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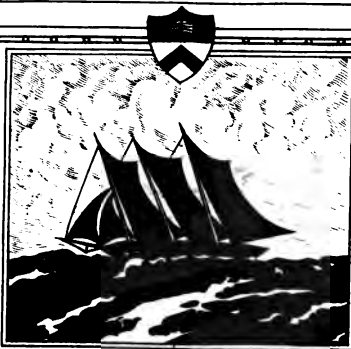
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CELTIC WATERS

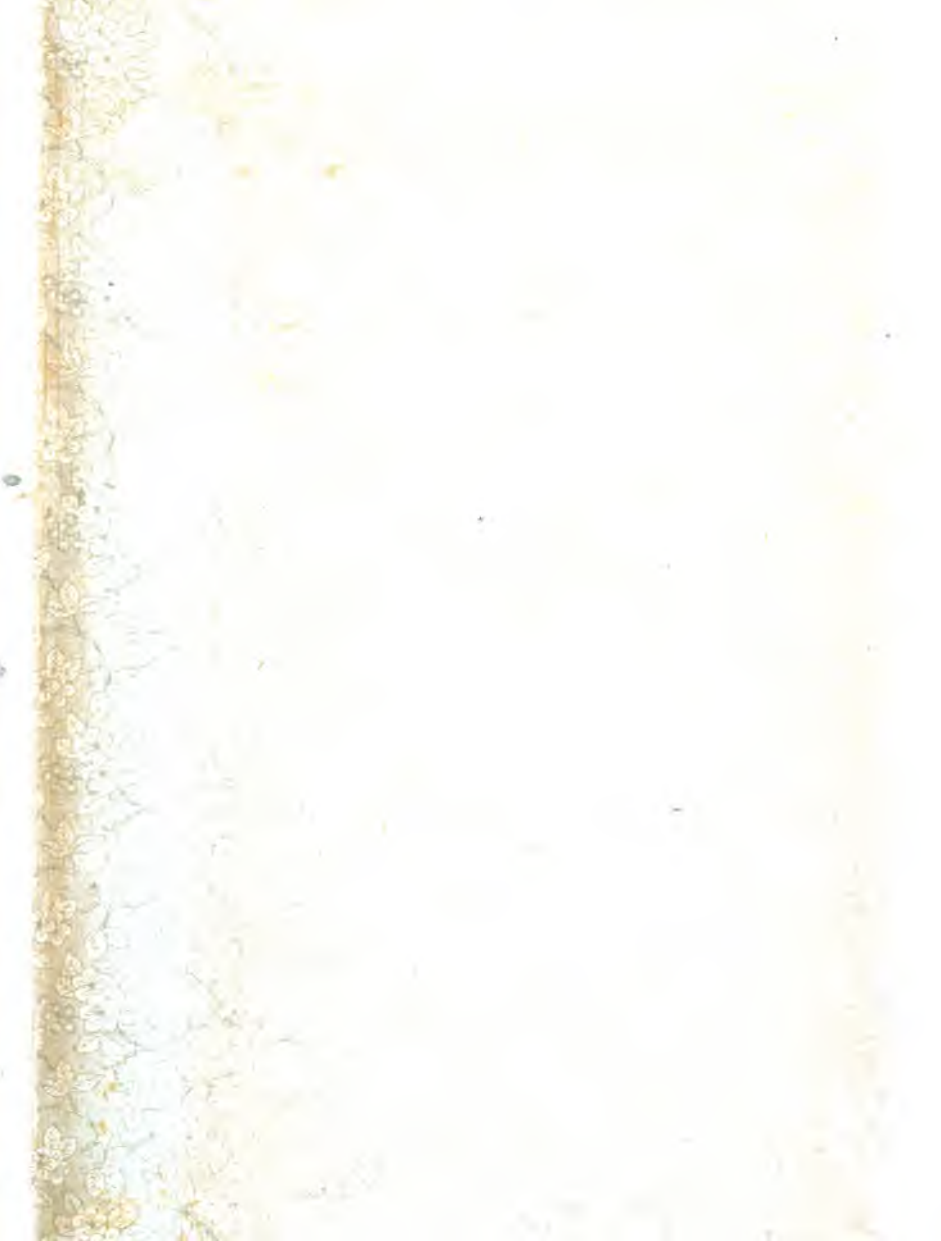
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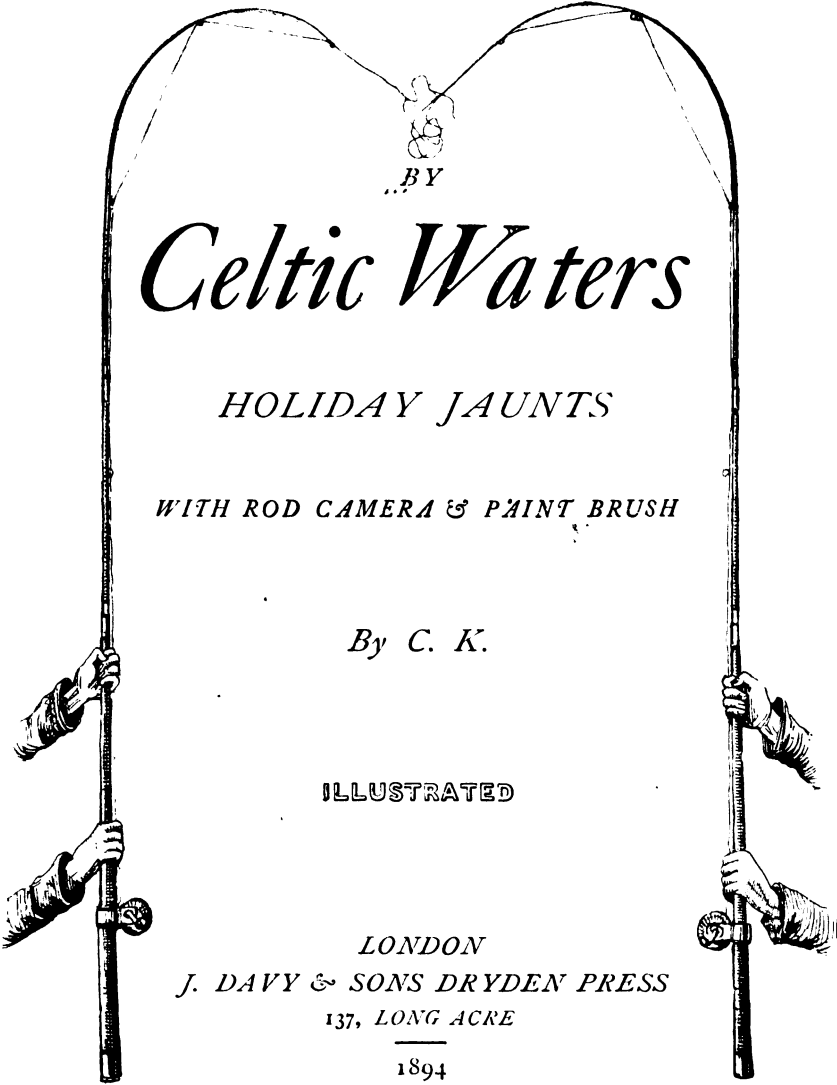
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BY CELTIC WATERS.



LANDING A $1\frac{1}{2}$ LB. TROUT (p. 128).





BY

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WITH ROD CAMERA & PAINT BRUSH

By C. K.

ILLUSTRATED

LONDON

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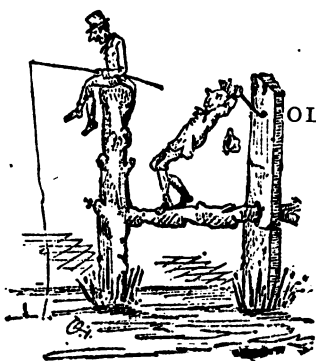
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P R E F A C E .



HOLIDAY JAUNTS “in a Radnorshire Arcadia,” and “In the Wilds of Donegal” first saw the light of day in the *Fishing Gazette*; and it is due to the kindness and courtesy of the Editor, R. B. Marston, Esq., that I am enabled to incorporate them in “BY CELTIC WATERS.”

The Psalmist made the sweeping assertion that “all men are liars.” St. Paul modified this considerably, and conferred the distinction on the Cretans. A wrong-headed public opinion

(RECAP)

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of to-day has awarded the palm of mendacity to the *genus* fisherman. The following pages, however, will be found utterly devoid of any stretches of imagination as well as of any literary merit; all they can lay claim to is "truth," which is sometimes stranger than fiction.



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A Radnorshire Arcadia.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY one Monday morning in April I started for the peaceful seclusion of a Radnorshire village, on the banks of the Ithon, where, during the spring months, excellent trout-ing may be had, combined with rest, peace, and exhilarating breezes, determined to cast care to the four winds of heaven, and to enjoy life among the bare Welsh hills, listening to the eternal music of the softly rippling stream.

I caught the mid-day train for Shrewsbury, and whirled away through the Midland meads, where birds and flowers seemed to rejoice in the vernal sunshine. Shrewsbury reached, I met my old friend George B., who had arranged to accompany me on this expedition, attended by two porters, simply groaning beneath loads of wraps, fishing-rods, creels, and other paraphernalia. Fishermen always seem to cart about with them a superabundance of traps, and George seems to out-do everyone in this respect. No one, at any rate, could be ignorant of our occupation for the next few weeks, and our fellow-passengers felt that there was one topic of conversation which would interest us, so they broke the ice by venturing a few remarks about the weather and the water, and strove to impress one with the idea that they were great authorities on this branch of sport.

Just before reaching Craven Arms, we crossed the Onny, and were delighted to find the water in such good order. Out of this stream I have often taken first-rate baskets.

It runs down a lovely wooded country, little known to excursionists, and I trust it will be long before they swoop down upon this romantic spot. Doubtless the directors of the little railroad that runs up the valley for a distance of eight miles, think otherwise, for they are sorely in need of traffic. At present it is anything but a paying concern,



and some very comical scenes have been enacted on its iron-way.

About eight p.m. we found ourselves snugly ensconced in a cosy sitting-room of a country inn. There are few such delightful places to be found now—the railway has long since sounded their death-knell.

But this is a wayside inn of the old sort (situated where you would least expect to find it) in the wilds of Radnorshire, its garden running down to the Ithon, which is crossed by a rustic bridge. There is a feeling of repose and seclusion about it which drives away all the shadows of life. There is a comfort, too, which the most palatial and luxurious of hotels fails to afford. One comes across people now and then who seem to delight in what they call "roughing it;" who glory over every possible discomfort, such as sleeping in a hay-loft, or back kitchen, or dirty bar parlour. Others find even a cheaper method of obtaining this discomfort by hiring a boat, rowing about during the day in an aimless manner and mooring it up in some stagnant creek at night to enjoy the attention of midges if the weather be balmy, or the pleasure of a good soaking if the weather be otherwise, and aching limbs when the morning comes; to say nothing of other attendant joys or nuisances, as they may choose to regard them, of cooking their own meals and washing up their pots and pans.

Two friends once induced me to camp out among the Welsh hills in a bell tent, in order to fish some little brooks. I went; but I have not the slightest desire to go again. Not a decent sleep did I obtain the whole time. The last night it rained and blew hurricanes—in the midst of which our canvas collapsed—oh, the misery of that night is indelibly stamped upon my memory! The collapse of one's shelter on such a night would doubtless be regarded by lovers of "roughing it" as heightening the pleasure. For my own part, I went home a sadder but a wiser man, realising that "roughing it" is far nicer in theory than in practice.

This country inn, which we made our headquarters for fishing the Ithon and its tributaries, is a model in its way of real comfort, cleanliness, and wholesome fare. Everything

is done in a quiet homely fashion to make your sojourn as pleasurable as possible. If you want a little unbroken rest, seek out such a place as this—you will not be disappointed. If you dread the busy idleness of chattering visitors and excursionists, come down here with your rod, and book, and pipe, and forget you are not a day's journey from the gay metropolis.

Tuesday morning loomed dark and threatening, with a nasty squally wind, which did not bode well for our day's sport. However, we were up betimes, prepared to make an early start, had the fair damsel who was deputed to wait on us brought our sandwiches in decent time. As it was, we both walked about like caged lions, not using the most complimentary language, resigning ourselves to the certain conviction that other fishermen would have fished our best runs and spoilt our sport. Little did she guess the conflicting emotions in our bosom of which she was the innocent cause.

Who has not been dogged by that fiend—the worst of all fiends—the demon of jealousy? I suppose that of all men the fisherman is the most familiar with him. The lover is ever revolving the most unchristian thoughts, and a diseased imagination is ever turning every one that approaches *her* into a hateful rival. No, he would not even be at peace were he to keep the object of his affections under a glass case! When he goes forth into the pure fresh air to take the birds and flowers into his confidence, and tries to free himself of the awful incubus of this monster, it is all in vain. The birds sing their notes of joy; the flowers dry their tears in the morning sun and lift up their radiant faces; the lark sings his innocent song at the gate of heaven; there is beauty in the world around; a restful, peaceful happiness; but, alas! not for him. The hateful shadow dogs his footsteps and shuts out the sunlight.

So with a fisherman. Every comer becomes an object of suspicion, every sound causes him to stand still and listen, dreading with ghastly fear lest his eyes should fall upon some other individual flogging his favourite stream—or he gazes on some fresh footprints on the sands with much the same horror as Robinson Crusoe gazed on cannibal tracks by the sad sea waves, while the muddy margin of the river reminds



THE ITHON AT LLANDEWY.

him ever of the empty chamber that had its floor sprinkled with flour to detect the traces of the mysterious visitant.

There is one fly which I never fail to have on my cast; that is the Orange Partridge. It was not until lately that I discovered its value, and how popular it is on the Ithon during the spring months. I was fishing up north one very

inclement season, and sport had been of the poorest description, when I came across a doctor who was simply a drivelling enthusiast on angling. It was his one hobby, on which he spent all his holiday, and I should say all his time, for his profession appeared to be a very secondary consideration. I have to thank this gentleman for drawing my attention to the Partridge Orange. I discovered very soon that for every fish grassed with the March Brown or Blue Dun, ten were grassed with the Orange, and I have found it, both in Scotland and Wales during the spring of the year, the most deadly fly.

Not a trout was feeding in the sparkling stream, or at the foot of clean gravel dubs, this cold, bleak day ; indeed, one need hardly take the trouble to fish where the bottom is gravelly on such a day as this, for the trout lie where there is nice warm mud. So we confined our attention to the water which ran slowly over muddy soil, and got fast in several very nice ones in deep holes, usually the haunt of chub.

We came across a Welshman of the ultra type, who owned one small farm on the river, and hated the sight of a fisherman. He is the only gentleman in the Principality that has had the honour of warning me off. This he did in a torrent of invectives in the Anglo-Welsh *patois*. We consented to comply with his polite request, if he on his part would undertake to show us the way off his estate, and as this only entailed the opening of one gate, the surly dog obliged us so far, and banged it after us, saying, "Noow yer may feesh as long as yer loike, and bad luck to yer !" However, in spite of the irascible farmer, of whose existence the people at the inn had kept a discreet silence, we experienced a very fair morning's sport, and when we sat down to discuss our sandwiches, we felt on the best terms with ourselves, six of our trout weighing close upon a pound, while twenty-two others ranged from $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. Lunch by the murmuring brook,

on a balmy summer's day is one of the most delightful meals I know of; but on a spring day, when the breeze is not the most genial, there is a great temptation to hurry it over, unless you happen to find some cosy shelter, where you can enjoy the warmth of the tender sunbeam, without the accompanying chilly blast. Nature, however, is not unkind; she means us well, and hurries us over our meal, that we may take time by the forelock, for in the spring-time down here the trout do not rise after 4 p.m., and never indulge in a late supper.

How often one's first day's fishing commences with intense keenness and buoyant spirits, and ends so differently. It was hard casting with that nasty squally wind blowing right across the river, yet the bracing mountain air and our love for the gentle art made us work away steadily until half-past three; then we got slack and began to feel weary in arms and legs, a sure sign we had had enough of it. So our faces were turned homewards—the walk back over the hills not being remarkable for any engaging conversation, or display of light-heartedness—indeed, I felt so played out and feeble as I shuffled down the hillside, that if one of those small innocent faced lambs had bumped against me in its gambols, I should inevitably have been knocked sprawling.

George followed painfully, dragging one leg after the other. His waders and brogues had managed to chafe his toes and heel, so he said and indeed testified to the fact, by being in anything but a cheerful humour.

So we trudged back in single file and silence. Once I ventured a joke of the very feeblest description, but my companion glanced at me so fiercely that I hung my head, and ventured upon no other until the inner man had been refreshed and invigorated by a well-earned dinner.

A Radnorshire Arcadia.

CHAPTER II.

Excellent as the Ithon and its tributaries are for trout in the spring months, yet these streams are not without their drawbacks. They are infested with swarms of huge chub, which, do what you will, contrive to hook themselves firm and secure, and insist on being towed to land like logs of wood, in order to taste the balmy air of heaven. Here a well-to-do chub does not consider his education complete until he has gone on this pilgrimage, and has been hurled back with many imprecations into his native stream, to relate his adventures to an admiring audience of relations and friends. George once tried to breakfast off an Ithon chub, and he came to the conclusion that you require to be on the verge of starvation before commencing a meal of this description. It is about the most nauseous article of diet extant. It is difficult to say what useful purpose these chub fulfil, for they are useless as far as sport is concerned, and if fate compels you to handle half-a-dozen of these brutes it will be some days before your hands return to their original sweetness, scrub how you may. It is possible that in the distant future chub may be utilised for scientific purposes. In "Gulliver's Travels" we have an account of his visit to the great Academy of Lagardo, and there Gulliver was introduced to a professor, who for eight years had been engaged upon the highly scientific project of extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers, which were to be put in phials, hermetically sealed, and let out to warm the air in raw inclement weather. He fancied in eight years he would be able to supply the governor's garden with sunshine at a reasonable rate.

Sir Robert Ball tells us "There is nothing absurd in this scientific undertaking, and that it is quite certain the leaves

of the cucumber plant do lay hold of the sunbeams, extract the heat, and lay up that heat in the fruit produced, and that the heat of these sunbeams could be extracted again, and could even be stored up in phials, hermetically sealed, and be utilised when occasion might require."

Now, one cannot help remarking how on the hottest days chub swim aimlessly about in the brilliant sunshine, consciously or unconsciously collecting the sunbeams, which their burnished scales seemed peculiarly adapted to attract. Could not some simple expedient be devised to extract these sunbeams at a non-prohibitive cost? As it is, these "loggerheads" appropriate the sunbeams without making any appreciable return. Possibly these sunbeams may be stored up against the winter months, when by some method supplied by a kind and indulgent Nature the chub is able to supply itself with sunshine and warmth "at a reasonable rate," and to bask once more in a genial, though artificial summer. Still, it would be well for the chubby reputation if science would come to the rescue and remove the stigma of selfishness by presenting them to a grateful humanity in the light of "universal providers." Perhaps some Professor Royal, writing a few years hence, may say that this is quite within the range of practical science.

What a boon it would be to some shivering fisherman upon a cold spring morning, if, having caught a loggerhead chub instead of a trout, he could console himself by extracting the sunbeams and using them as required! What a delightful lunch he would have under some sheltered bank, with sunbeams all around him!

As it is, however, these chub in the Ithon are a perfect nuisance. We use impolite language towards them, unhook them without much ceremony, and fling them back with imprecations, while on the bosom of the murmuring stream is borne the monosyllable, "Brute." Some fishermen

condemn them to lie and rot in the sunshine, of which one is unpleasantly reminded at times.

But what quite ruins our amiable disposition in this district are the samlets. Their name is legion. Some days they are terribly *en évidence*, and whole hours are wasted in picking them off one's line and returning them to their



THE ALPINE BRIDGE OVER THE ITHON. THE HAUNT OF CHUB.

native element, and as a rule directly the trout begin to rise these imps of iniquity become more sedulous in their attentions. Not only do they ruin one's temper, but spoil one's fishing also, for in our efforts to avoid striking them a good trout is often let off.

Our second day on the Ithon was pregnant with such drawbacks. Chub after chub we caught and hurled back again until our arms grew weary and our eyes simply loathed the sight of them, and as for samlet, the river seemed to boil with them. They rose in shoals and appropriated every fly. If we determined not to strike, they calmly hooked themselves, and danced and wriggled about until they had weaved the cast into a fearful tangle—when they seemed content, and assumed a self-satisfied air, as if they were proud of their day's work. Then we would have to sit down and patiently unravel our lines, and having done so, begin to cast again, making desperate efforts to keep calm; then perhaps a big trout would rise and we would strike too late, and in our mad fury swished the line back again with such terrific force that every fish within a hundred yards was scared. Then we would remove to another run, vowing not to be put off by those "beastly samlet," by striking too late again—and we would be true to our vow when the next fish rose, and hook him well—and oh, ye cruel fates! it would turn out to be a loggerhead chub. This was too much—we would sit down on the bank utterly heart-broken, and feel that we could cry. George seemed to gasp for breath and to be choking with rage and indignation, and looked as if he wanted to kick somebody or something very badly, to relieve the spasm. We quietly meditated why we were thus pursued by an unrelenting fate, and wondered if either of us had forgotten to say our prayers, or had trespassed in any other way.

Out came our pipes—we smoked in silent reverie, ejecting vast clouds, and so regained our usual equanimity. Without that pipe we should have done something tragic. There is a limit to human patience and endurance, though we know not what the limit is. We felt that it had been reached, and that we were standing on the verge of a

precipice, ready to fling ourselves down, or do anything desperate. However, the pipe saved us.

I have scant regard for men that don't smoke ; they are like unmusical people—"fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils ; the motions of their spirit are dull as night, and their affections dark as Erebus." The nineteenth-century girls have found out that smokers make the better husbands, and several of my female acquaintances have declared that nothing would induce them to take for their better-half a non-smoker. These girls are wise in their generation. The smoking husband is more confiding and more domesticated. What cannot the wife worm out of him as he smokes the evening pipe of peace? In that sweet hour his heart is bare and open to the object of his love, and the soft old duffer becomes like clay in the hand of the potter.

No, girls are not fools ; they know too well which side their bread is buttered ; and for a moral certainty, in the years to come, non-smokers as husbands will be out of it, or will have to be content to wed with the plainest and most unattractive specimens of the weaker sex.

Well, we only caught a dozen trout between us, weighing 4½ lbs., and as we wended our way home, we tried to console ourselves with the thought of the splendid sport we should have had if all our geese had been swans—I mean, if all our chub had been trout, for we calculated to have caught about forty chub, and between one and two hundred samlet.

The young woman who attended to our wants was a perfect treasure to a fisherman in a strange land. She reminded me vividly of a waiting-maid I once came across in a Devonshire country inn, and whose memory will ever be green in my recollection.

This Devonshire lass was well versed in fishing lore, and could tell you the most killing flies on particular days and

where the best fish lay. She seemed to take a personal interest in me, and would assume a very melancholy air when I had but a poor basket of fish to show. You had but to state your wants, and she was ready at hand with the required article, or to ask a question, and to have it answered by this walking encyclopædia, and therefore she cannot be passed over without remark. I have composed several pieces of poetry in her honour, but somehow or other, in reading them over, none of them seemed adequately to express her charms, so I am reduced to cribbing a bit of Calverley :—

“ Oh, my rustic maid, still unforgotten,
With your downcast eyes of dreamy blue ;
Never, somehow, could I seem to cotton
To another as I did to you.”

I think this will do—especially “the downcast eyes of dreamy blue.” George says, “That’s her all over,” which is one of his wretched vulgarisms, as she is neither “eyes all over” nor “blue all over.” But she had a mysterious air about her which I cannot account for or define. It is not that she was neglectful of common duties or lacked interest in mundane affairs. No, she threw herself into the great enterprises of the day—I mean our dinner and comfort—with great enthusiasm ; yet there was this mysterious something about her which arrested my attention. When you addressed her, she put on a strange, vacant stare, and remained silent for some moments, then, with a start, she seemed to come to herself, and made reply ; but the voice never seemed to proceed from her mouth ; the voice was the honeyed voice of our handmaid, but invariably it came from her boots or from under the table, or from the cupboard or ceiling—in fact, from anywhere save that place which Nature had distinctly pointed out as the proper exit. She seemed to be a female Valentine Vox, and would certainly

have made her fortune as a ventriloquist. O ye managers of the Westminster Aquarium, there is a treasure lying hid in this way-side inn ! Here is one living a humdrum existence in her native wilds, unknown and unhonoured, because no enterprising person has yet discovered her latent talents. If the late Mr. Barnum had ever come across this girl, he would not have been satisfied until she had been added to that unique collection in his travelling menagerie.

CHAPTER III.

"A DONKEY DAY."

A sharp north-easter was blowing as I tramped a mile or so up-stream before commencing operations—the water was fine and rather lower than I liked—and consequently from the state of the elements I did not anticipate a very successful day's sport. I fished several favourite pools without any success, in fact, not a fish seemed to be stirring. So I took off my flies and put on a Devon Minnow, and tried several good runs without even moving a fish.

Visions of a worn-out figure tottering home to dinner with an empty basket flitted across my mind. Of course, everyone I encountered would ask what luck I had had; and would insist on looking into my creel.

That's always the sort of thing when one has had no sport.

I don't know how it is, but no one pays the slightest attention when you happen to have a good show of fish; the people you meet seem absolutely devoid of curiosity and inquisitiveness, although you may go out of your way

to arouse it. I go into the bar-parlour when my basket is full of beauties, and give out I have had a real good day, but nobody asks to see what I have caught. I open the lid and invite anyone to come and see the result of my day's sport, but no one responds to the invitation. On the other hand, if I should be so unfortunate as to return with an empty creel, the whole village runs after me to know what I have done; and I am mobbed by anxious inquiries as I essay to slip into our sitting-room without observation.

"That's just what will happen to me to-day," I muttered, as I tried a likely run, "I shall catch two or three as long as my finger, and then creep back home hoping to escape notice; but by some strange fatality I shall knock up against everyone I know in the place, all of whom will insist on button-holing and cross-questioning me with regard to the day's sport."

At last, wearied and disgusted with my non-success, I flung myself down upon the grass, intending to light up a pipe, when down came a torrent of rain, hail, and sleet, which seemed to freeze up my spinal marrow, and cut my face and neck till I almost howled with pain, and as to my hands, all feeling appeared to have left them for ever. Rendered almost frantic, in sheer desperation I seized my rod, and began spinning in some deep dead water of a brooklet called the Cwmarron, which joined the Ithon at the point where I had desisted for a while, my object solely being to restore circulation to my frozen limbs. At the very first draw three large trout darted out from goodness knows where, and had a real good race for the possession of the minnow. One of them seized it so savagely and determinedly that there was little chance of losing him. After a very short tussel he was grassed—a $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. trout within an ounce.

Again I spun the minnow, with the same result, in a place I should not have thought worth trying with a Devon in my sane moments ; they absolutely jostled against one another in their eagerness to get the bait.

This sudden onslaught, after my previous unsuccess, fairly astonished me. The fish seemed literally to have gone mad with hunger. I was obliged to pinch myself very hard before I could be sure that the whole thing was not the baseless fabric of a vision. It seemed unnatural and uncanny, for in an hour, in less than four hundred yards of water, I had crammed my basket full of real beauties. Having done this, I gave up the slaughter of the innocents, and went home in a joyful frame of mind to ruminate over the phenomenon.

Of course I did not come across a single soul ; one would suppose the whole village to be deserted.

But what on earth—or in the clouds—had affected the trout in this strange manner? The storm continued for about twenty minutes, and during that unpleasant period they behaved like demons. When the storm had passed off they still went well, but not with the same mad ferocity and determination. Something in that storm must have stimulated their appetites. What was it? Possibly with the storm there came some electric current which affected the fish in much the same manner as a sherry and bitters is popularly supposed to affect jaded humanity. But the storm was experienced in other parts of the river, without the extreme voracity on the part of the trout. It seemed confined to the small brooklet where I was fishing. So my electric current theory looks queer.

George, in his usual off-hand manner, attributed it to "pure cussedness" on the part of the fish, which no theory could explain ; that when the storm began a general day's outing was agreed upon up the Cwmarron, and, indeed, a

day's outing, in a very prolonged sense, many of them enjoyed.

My fishing companion was fairly astonished at my day's catch on his return home. He had got a decent lot, and I fancy had been calculating on his way back how he was going to put my nose out of joint. He looked a bit flabbergasted when I produced my trout, all carefully laid out upon a dish, the largest being arranged at the top, so as to catch the eye.

I always notice how, in every basket or dish, the big fish have a knack of getting uppermost; of course it is all pure chance, or, as some say, a law of Nature, not only with fish, but with the biggest strawberries and marbles, &c. I confess I purposely place the big fish uppermost. They are impressive. At any rate, they made such an impression on George, that he darkly hinted I had not come by these fish fairly; it required a good dinner and a cigar before he would believe my tale. It is then we fight our battles over again, for then there is peace and quiet.

Once we were located in the Land o' Cakes at an inn where the son and daughter of the landlord selected this evening hour to practice duets. A piano was in the room adjoining our sitting-room, where these two were wont to disport themselves, working up some songs and duets (I imagine) against the annual village concert in the winter. Their effusions appeared to be very plaintive ditties, and full of sentiment, yet they did not recommend themselves to us in the least. Possibly the monotonous repetition was accountable for this, for the first night we rather fancied them, afterwards they made us feel unhappy. The young man sung a very dismal kind of bass: at one time he appeared to be singing in his boots, at another time in a tremulous quaver on the upper notes; while the young lady burst now and again into a fit of shrieks, sufficient to give

any rightly-formed person lockjaw. We played the martyrs as long as possible, and then, in sheer desperation, joined in with the idea that we were improving, and giving tone and body to the singing. One evening we were entirely disabused of this notion by a stranger who happened to be spending the night in the house. The young lady was just in the act of shrieking herself into a fit ; her brother was singing a lugubrious bass in his boots ; George was helping with what he was pleased to call alto, but which was more like the howl of some creature in mortal agony ; while I took the tenor, which I flatter myself was decently rendered, when we heard a commotion on the landing, and a stentorian voice calling for the landlady. It was only the stranger in his night-shirt, shouting over the bannisters to ascertain if he had got into Bedlam by mistake.

We refrained from any further participation after this insult, and allowed the other two to have it all to themselves. Nothing would deter them, I feel sure, bar the aforesaid lockjaw. I trust they had a large and appreciative audience when they appeared before the foot-lights to give the result of their patient labour.

George caught two dozen nice little fish with the Orange Partridge and March Brown, but the proportion was four to one with the former. No less than three fishermen had startled him with a "Hi!" in the act of landing a fish, to know what fly he was hauling them out with.

LAMENT OF A FLY.

I often sorrow o'er my fate,
And ask if Fate can tell me why—
(If in the day 'tis not too late
To ask) why unrelenting hate
Has christened me, sad to relate,
A fly !

A fly! oh! how I loathe that word—
But why! a fly alone am I?
'Tis neither fish, nor flesh, nor bird;
Can anything be more absurd?
When birds, and fish, and pigs, I've heard
Can fly!

Ah! yes—the best of spirits quail,
Leaps from its lair the deep-drawn sigh,
And limbs so lithe and active fail,
When spinsters raising up their veil,
And waving high the gingham, hail
A fly.

When wretches of another sort,
Startle each other with a “Hi!”
Meekly inquire what kind of sport;
The reason of their coming short,
And then—oh, heartless brutes, retort—
What fly!

But why repine, when vengeance true
Is exercised by every fly?
I'll tell you what I'll up and do—
Romantic death comes but to few—
Revenge is sweet—I'll drop into
Their eye.

Many a shock to my nervous system have I received through inquisitive anglers suddenly yelling at me behind my back, or from among bushes, to know “what fly they were taking?” It is positive cruelty to do so when a man is playing a big fish, and his nerves are at a high state of tension. However, I feel amply avenged when I tell them the Orange Partridge, and learn they haven't got one, for the natives down here never use this fly.

CHAPTER IV.

"AN ADVERTISED FISHING HAUNT."

A letter arrived from a friend of George's, who rejoices in the cognomen of "Birdie," to say that he (Birdie) intended going down to the Dibbling Arms Hotel for a week's fishing, and begging us to join him there for a few days.

The Dibbling Arms is an advertised fishing haunt, a good distance by rail from where we are located. Personally I didn't smile upon the enterprise at all. I had not heard good reports of the "eight miles of water well stocked with trout and free visitors," while Birdie, although an excellent companion, is not a first-rate specimen of a fisherman, sport being with him sometimes a secondary consideration.

One season in Scotland I remarked how extraordinarily keen he always was to fish a certain reach of water, which was about the worst in the whole stream. I thought at first it was pure unselfishness on his part, and that he selected it in order to give me the best.

I found the true reason to be otherwise.

Just above this particular reach there was a celebrated whisky distillery, well-known to fame, whither Birdie delighted to wend his way, on the pretext that he had been commissioned by friends to try samples. So every evening after the cloth had been removed, the sly young dog used to produce his sample bottle and discuss the merits of the liquor it contained. And then he would wax eloquent and dilate on the pleasures of fishing, and bang his fist down on the table as he roundly asserted that it was *par excellence* "the contemplative man's recreation." I managed to suppress a smile in order not to injure the contemplative man's feelings—I would not consciously hurt the feelings of a contemplative spider.

However, as George seemed determined to go to the Dibbling Arms, I offered no opposition, so we left the Ithon and its game little trout.

At Dibbling Station we arrived late in the afternoon, and were surprised to find no conveyance of any description, although we had telegraphed requesting to be met. The station-master, however, relieved our minds by saying that he believed a wheel-barrow was in waiting to convey us to the hotel, a distance of barely half a mile. This was news indeed !

We ran into the arms of a man with a cork leg, who was the proud Jehu of the aforesaid wheel-barrow, and asked him in a bantering tone which he would take first, us or our luggage ; or could he manage both ?

He stared very hard at us, but never spoke. Evidently he was not a man to be trifled with, so we went in search of the solitary porter, and metaphorically fell on our knees, and prayed that he would deign to help us convey our luggage to the barrow. He said perhaps he would after he had collected the tickets. We heartily thanked him for his condescension.

The man with the cork-leg gave vent to many growls because he could only take the one-half of our *impedimenta*, and would have to make a second journey, and having assumed a martyr-like demeanour, he got between the shafts and set off, George and I bringing up the rear. On the way everybody rushed out to scan the new arrivals. I thought they pointed after us, and shouted out something, which sounded like "catch all those that died last year." George said "it was pure imagination," so I don't press the point.

Standing at the entrance of the Dibbling Arms was a lordly-looking creature, some six feet high, gorgeously arrayed in a coat and waistcoat of large check pattern, and breeches and gaiters of faultless cut. We put him down for nothing

less than a duke. Birdie, who had arrived by an earlier train, was conversing with him, and introduced us. He turned out to be something more modest than a duke, simply the landlord of the Dibbling Arms. He surveyed us superciliously from head to foot, spoke a few patronising words of welcome, and then rang the bell for the boots and chambermaid. Afterwards he again deigned to address a few words to us, but in such a manner as to impress us with our own smallness and his greatness.

We inquired if fishermen were experiencing good sport just at present.

‘Excellent,’ replied the pompous one; ‘but’—and here he became very impressive—‘the fish in this river require a first-rate performer with the rod and line. Plenty of trout, sirs, if you are men enough to catch them.’

We felt we were in the presence of a past master of the art, and having mumbled something about ‘trusting we should render a good account of ourselves and the fish,’ we slunk off.

George dubbed this lordly creature ‘The Squire of Dibbling.’

On the morrow we found out what the Squire had said to be only too true in one particular—it required a first-rate fisherman and something more to catch the trout. If there were any in the stream, I fancy they had long since learnt to distinguish the difference between the artificial fly and the natural. Having been brought into daily contact with the artificial, its detection became an hereditary instinct, and they not only refused to look at it, but fled from it as from the plague.

We met five or six rods on the water, and of each, of course, we inquired what sport! All in turn answered with a sickly smile, ‘Nothing!’ They seemed quite resigned to their fate, and did not even ask us if we had fared better,

for they opined seemingly that such a question would be merely waste of breath.

George settled down into a gloomy, morose, and melancholy man ; while I went about muttering to myself, "I knew how it would be," and looking things unutterable at the other two. Birdie alone seemed perfectly unconcerned and quite happy. When he had flogged the stream for four consecutive hours without getting a rise, it suddenly occurred to him that he might better employ himself ; so he adjourned to the bar parlour, where he smoked his pipe, and discoursed to an admiring audience of the various sports on which he considered himself an authority.

The Squire met us wending our way sorrowfully home. In answer to his salutations, we returned very curt replies, for we began to have our suspicions that he was a humbug and impostor. To our surprise he became graciously condescending, and made no end of excuses for our ill-luck, and, furthermore, promised to take us on the morrow up to a lake amongst the hills, where he would guarantee sport. We thanked him, and rather blamed ourselves for our evil thoughts concerning him.

On the morrow we started early for the happy fishing ground aforesaid. We were light-hearted and smiling, for we reckoned we were in for a good thing. The Squire was confident and chatty, and graciously accepted "a leetle segar," as he called it. The distance was about four miles; uphill all the way, and over as bad a bit of country as anyone who went in for this sort of thing would wish to travel. Birdie remarked to the Squire that it reminded him of Scotland, and very innocently inquired if there was a whisky distillery anywhere in the neighbourhood, as this seemed to be the very place for one.

The Squire shook his head, and replied in the negative.

A look of unspeakable anguish overspread Birdie's face:

He gave vent to a hollow groan, sank down upon the grass, rested his weary head between his hands, and looked as if he were going to cry. He said it really was too bad of the Welsh people not to utilise their beautiful country, and deprecated their lack of enterprise and "go," and compared them very unfavourably with the Scotch.

At length, after much climbing, we gained the summit of the hills, and lying in a hollow we descried a splendid stretch of water. George took off his cap and waved it over his head, yelling "Thalassa! Thalassa!" as certain Greek heroes did of old, and broke into the regulation jog-trot which historians never omit to mention when speaking of those ancient veterans.

The Squire, who did not understand Greek, thought that George had caught sight of a petticoat in the distance, and was shouting "The lassie! The lassie!" for he turned to me and said, "Sure your friend is a very gallant gentleman; maybe he is on the look-out for a Welsh lassie for a wife." I explained to him the meaning of the exclamation, but he cut me short with "Ah! yes; of course," &c., as if he was well acquainted with the historical incident.

We were introduced with pride to what the Squire was pleased to call a boat, but which seemed to us to be a specimen of an antique coracle, built in the days when Llewellyn had encamped on the neighbouring hills, and supplied his valorous followers with the product of the lake to ward off starvation.

Birdie declined altogether to risk his life in such a craft, and consoled himself with the thought that possibly as good fishing could be obtained by wading from the shore. He commenced to tell a yarn of some friend who had had a splendid day's sport on the bank of a loch, when he was rudely interrupted by the Squire, who told him "to go and teach his grandmother to suck eggs."

Birdie is of a very sensitive disposition, and, as he said afterwards, if George or myself had offered this kind suggestion he would have taken it in good part; but to have his ancient relative's name taken in vain by a vulgar hotel-keeper was more than he could swallow. After darting an angry glance at his interrupter he made off, without another word, to the other side of the lake, meditating revenge.

We three took to the boat, our slightest movement disturbing its equilibrium in an alarming manner. The fish in the lake ran from 1 oz. up to $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. ; they rose freely, and there was little sport in catching them.

The Squire appeared to be enraptured. "Isn't it grand fun?" he said; "I told you I'd guarantee sport up here."

"Yes," replied George, with a wink at me, "one doesn't come in for this sort of thing every day. I suppose you keep the good things until last? Sly dog!"

"Well, to tell you the truth," said the Squire, "I call this my preserve, and keep it a bit dark, or else I should be pestered to death for permission to fish."

We laughed uproariously at this, the Squire failing to see the joke.

I ventured to inquire if he ever caught a fish over a quarter of a pound.

"Not often! Not often!" he replied. "As a matter of fact I consider the small ones gives better sport, and are certainly nicer eating."

George pretended to agree in this, and said, "Hear! hear!" and shook hands with the Squire, exchanging flasks at the same time.

When the Squire had got the flask well between his lips and was imbibing the contents, George shook his fist at him, implying he would like to punch his head, which action the Squire caught sight of and asked for an explanation.

George got out of it by saying, "My good sir, you mistake my action altogether, I was merely intimating my anxiety about my flask, for you seemed as if you were about to swallow it."

I picked up a small stickleback in the form of a trout, which I had just caught, and aimed it at George's head by way of reproof; but miscalculating my aim, hit the Squire right in the mouth. Then he arose in wrath, and let us have it in spite of my reiterated apologies.

He said, "You are just a parcel of bally-raggers, with about as much notion of fishing as the man in the moon."

I implored him not to be hard on that aged gentleman, as it was well-known there was no water on the surface of the orb over which he reigned; and therefore it was quite within the bounds of probability there were no fish. Such being the case, I appealed to every generous feeling he possessed not to taunt this far-away and long-respected gent, for his lack of proficiency in an art which he had had no opportunity of pursuing. This appeal seemed to make him grow madder.

"I tell you what it is my boy," he replied. "I'm too old a bird to be caught by chaff. Just you shut it; and go home and sell that rod, and buy a bit of sugar-candy!"

Then George up and offered to bet the Squire a dinner that he and I would each of us catch a larger number of these miserable tarn trout than he (the Squire) would. The bet was accepted, and in silence we entered upon the contest.

At the first throw George's and the Squire's lines met—embraced—and agreed never to part again.

"Silly idiot!" muttered George.

"Clumsy lout!" soliloquised the Squire.

We had the luck to catch three fish each before the Squire had caught one. This seemed to totally unsettle him, and

make him strike too hurriedly at the fish in his eagerness to get on level terms.

Just at this moment we heard a tremendous floundering in the water behind us, as if a herd of cattle was stampeding out of the lake. It was only Birdie masquerading. He, too, seemed to have tired of catching these diminutive trout ; and so, having hooked one smaller than usual, he floundered out of the water up the hillside, dragging the stickleback after him, and there held it up sarcastically for the Squire's benefit. This quite settled the Squire, and lost him his wager. He whipped, and flogged, and struck, and missed, using choice expressions in guttural Welsh interspersed with English not to be found in any regulation dictionary. At last, in his ire, he stepped on the fish I had flung at George, slipped up, and fell backwards clean out of the boat, nearly capsizing it in his so doing. For a moment not a glimpse of his portly figure was to be seen, then he rose to the surface spitting and spluttering, and made for the boat as if to try and clamber in.

George seized an oar, and yelled, "Hang on ! hang on, you dunderhead ! None of that nonsense." The Squire, who had evidently lost his head, spluttered, "For mercy's sake, help us up !"

George, looking very serious, replied, "Hang on, you silly duffer. If you try and get in I'll brain you with this oar."

Birdie, on the shore, who had evidently been reading *Pickwick*, and knew exactly what to do in such an emergency, threw his rod on the ground, and ran up and down the hillside, shouting, "Fire, fire ! murder ! thieves !" at the top of his voice, making the welkin ring afar.

However, by dint of much shouting and yelling we got the Squire into a reasonable frame of mind, and he allowed us to tow him to shore. He appeared very crest-fallen, elected to go straight home, and, report says, was never the

same man again. Of course we didn't go on with this fishing farce any longer ; so after lunch we packed up our traps and went on a journey of exploration.

CHAPTER V.

We bade the Squire adieu early in the morning. He expressed the hope that we would come again and make a longer stay.

"Recommend the place to your fishing friends," he said. We replied, "Oh, certainly," mentally resolving that we should strongly recommend them to avoid it. And then, with the man of cork-leg fame and his barrow, we made off for the station, with the intention of spending a few more days on the banks of our beloved Ithon.

On some of these Welsh lines, when the trains get up steam, they are apt to roll about in an alarming manner, and shake one's internals into an utter jumble. To such as daily propound the question, "Is life worth living?" and find a solution in the answer, "It depends upon the liver," doubtless this rolling and shaking comes as a boon and a blessing. Were I a doctor about to prescribe for a patient with a liver, I should, without hesitation, advise him to take a season ticket upon one of these lines. A philanthropic Government might take the matter up and run an "express liver train," allowing all retired Anglo-Indian officials to travel half-price. This would be the first step of a paternal Government which had the welfare of its people and officials sincerely at heart.

We travelled in one of these "express liver trains," but not being troubled with the complaint we decidedly objected to be experimented upon. A nervous old lady in our carriage

opined that the driver must be drunk, and signified her intention of giving him in charge at the next stop.

We arrived towards evening at our old quarters, and got, as usual, a hearty welcome. It rained, unfortunately, the whole night, so that in the morning we found the river too much stained for our doing any execution with the fly. Stewart tackle and a worm we decided to be the order of the day, so we went off in search of our friend, the ostler, to procure us the latter commodity.

I have always had a preference for small streams with Stewart tackle ; you can lob your worm into each pool and eddy, and if you fish it properly you are certain to have a run with every fish on the feed. You have such perfect command over a small stream, that although your fish may be individually smaller than those caught in the main stream, yet your take will probably be more numerous and your basket heavier. George and Birdie set out to try the lower stretch of the Ithon, while I drove to a streamlet (I forget its name) some two and a-half miles away.

I give what I call my brook-rod an outing when I am abroad with the worm up these murmuring brooks. It is a small stiff bamboo, as light as a feather, made by Farlow. It has a special top also for spinning. This is my lucky rod, for I cannot call to mind a blank day when we two have been together. Many a good basketful has it been responsible for.

It was a lovely balmy morning, the sun having begun to disperse the rain-clouds, as I set to work and dropped the worm into a grand run. Almost immediately my line began to twitch slightly, warning me that there was something after it ; then came a vigorous jerk, and I struck. Away went a lusty trout up-stream. Checked in his flight, he gave three or four brave leaps, and tried to make off again for hidden stubs. But I could afford to be a bit

rough with him ; so I wound up and brought him without ceremony in reach of my landing net—a half-pound fish, in prime condition, and with such a golden shimmer on him.

“ Not bad for the first throw in,” I ejaculated, and at the thought my spirits rose ten degrees. Another wriggling worm was soon twisted round the hooks (this is the unpleasant part of fishing with a running worm—it always seems so beastly cruel : but I try to convince myself that their wriggles are caused by the instinct of self-preservation, and not by pain), and then I had a try under a likely overhanging bank. The worm drops nicely on the shelving rock, and glides off into the water with a flop. I was not disappointed, for in a moment it was seized by a good fish, who made with a tremendous rush for a hole in the bank. I lugged him out into mid-stream, and away he went splashing and dashing towards some reeds. Too much law is fatal in these brooks, so I handled him roughly and took my chance. But fortunately he was well hooked, and was soon safe enough in my landing-net—a well-fed fish, an ounce or so heavier than the first. Then I tried a deep pool where the water swirled and eddied under a precipitous cliff. Surely I ought to get into a big fish here, I thought. But no ! I tried it all ways, but not a run of any description. A loggerhead chub followed it up, but saw me and made off. The fish were evidently in the runs, on the look-out for food. So I hurried on to try one just above the pool where once before I caught a couple of good ones. Plop goes the worm alongside some bushes, but not a sign of a fish. I tried half-a-yard higher up, and in an instant a large fish seized it, and made for his lair. Hold hard, my boy ! If you get there I’m done ; and by main force I dragged him out of danger across the stream on to some shingle, where he lay and gasped in astonishment. It was all over in less than sixty seconds, and as I placed him in my basket I

couldn't help humming the popular ditty, "Oh, what a surprise!"

So I went on picking up a fish here and there until a voracious appetite compelled me to desist and discuss my packet of sandwiches and sip the diluted water—while over the meditative pipe I gazed with pride on the fourteen trout which the united efforts of bamboo and myself had grassed. Half-a-dozen Hereford steers, generally called in the vernacular of the district "Yorefords," peered at me with their pale faces from the opposite bank, while the ubiquitous ouzel gazed at me inquiringly from a stone in mid-stream. Two boys, who had been disturbing the stillness of the spring morning by scaring crows, utilised their dinner-hour by munching bread and cheese and sailing paper boats.

Some year soon I mean to try a Canadian canoe on the Ithon. In the spring when there is plenty of water you might get along well without having to carry your boat too often. Once I had a peculiar experience of these crafts. I and a friend (F. R. B.) thought we would buy one, and go on a voyage of exploration. As neither of us knew how to handle them, we determined first of all to hire one, and learn the business on Father Thames. We obtained what purported to be a Canadian canoe in the neighbourhood of Molesey, but which, all the same, was not built on the usual lines. However, it was this, or nothing else. The boatman arranged the seats in bow and stern—F. R. B., who is some two stone heavier than I am, seating himself in the bows, while I arranged myself comfortably in the stern. The start was somewhat ludicrous. We essayed to propel our craft up-stream, but this she unhesitatingly declined to submit to, for she spun round and round in mid-stream like a teetotum, usually concluding these evolutions by dashing violently into the bank. We could hear the whistles of steam launches blowing frantically, as we

made terrific efforts to get out of the way, which were vociferously cheered from the bank. It was an invidious position to be placed in, yet it seemed to afford immense amusement to a small crowd on the towpath. We gave one another plenty of advice, intermingled with abuse, all to no purpose. We were absolutely helpless to prevent these evolutions, as round and round our boat careered like a fractious steed. To add to the unpleasant situation, two girls in a smart canoe paddled by with charming grace and ease, laughing sarcastically as they watched us in the sweat of our brow strive to coax our craft into keeping a straight course. At last, utterly wearied and exhausted by our fruitless exertions, we held a council of war, and came to the conclusion that she was wrongly freighted. My heavy friend betook himself to the centre of the boat, an arrangement which seemed fairly satisfactory. I rather suspect that boatman was having a lark with us ; if I knew this for certain, I'd —.

But to resume.

The pipe finished, I set to work again with the hope that I might get ten more specklebacks to make up a couple of dozen. The scenery grew wilder and wilder. Here and there a farm nestled amid the hills, with a whitewashed cottage attached, but not a human being was visible ; not a sound disturbed the noontide peace save the distant bark of a sheep-dog, or the peewit's startled cry. After having worked hard for upwards of an hour, and having caught only four of the required number—and they but small ones—I resolved to turn back and fish home. Horror ! I found the fish were rising well to the fly, for the water had rapidly fined down. Having no fly-rod with me, I had no alternative but to resort to what I call “daping,” but which George calls “snooking.” A short stiff rod is just the thing for daping with a fly, artificial or real, just as

you please. A live bluebottle is best if you can get one. It is not an edifying spectacle; for one is obliged to crawl about on hands and knees, so as to keep one's carcass out of sight, and yet be able to see the fly as it rests on the top of the water. Here is some advice to a novice at this art. When you see a fish making for your fly be calm. When he opens his mouth, drop it politely in and then strike. If you do this the fish is done; if you forget this act of politeness and strike, you are done to a certainty. The following notes speak for themselves as to my success.

3.15 p.m.—Daping with a March Brown; caught one, missed one; very dry work. 3.30.—Caught two more; ought to have had three, but forgot to be polite in the excitement of the moment; struck too soon, and missed the largest fish I've seen to-day. Just my luck; must be calm! 4 p.m.—Still daping. Hurrah! Caught two more; only require one more to make up two dozen. Nothing like perseverance. Proud that the family motto is "*Perseverantia et diligentia*." 4.30.—Daping no longer; have done sufficient of this to last a considerable time. Saw required fish approaching his doom; just about to strike—when overhanging bank gave way and landed me into three feet of mud and water. Dabbled about some time after hat and rod, and finally emerged cool and collected. Paddle off home. Hope George won't chaff; never felt less in the humour for it.

6 p.m.—Home at last, thank goodness! Covered in mud and slush—very disreputable object. Children out of school, jeered as I passed, and sang something in native *patois*, which sounded like "He's got 'em on." George, Birdie, and several others standing outside the inn door listening to a German band. Most unfortunate this. George wanted to know what on earth I'd been doing. Natives exclaim, "Oh, lorks!" and snigger. Thought I heard

someone say, "What a dirty creatur!" "Caught anything?" they ask. "Two dozen," I reply, in a matter of fact way, carefully forgetting I was one short of that number. "Should have caught double as many but for an accident," I proceeded to explain. "Hooked a very large fish, played him for half-an-hour; became exhausted from heat and thirst; banks greasy; slipped into a deep hole; lost him; came home." Anecdote has great effect on audience. Natives say, "Well, I never!" No more chaff; good fisherman; will have 'em somehow. Retire chuckling.

* * * * *

Hot bath—good dinner—relate day's adventures, drawing slightly on imagination—pipe—bed.

CHAPTER VI.

Our favourite stretch of the Ithon necessitates a long three-mile walk across country, but when in good trim one hails with delight such a tramp on a lovely spring morning across the glistening fields, along the narrow path, through the wood, over the bleak hills, finishing up with a good scramble down over stone walls and hedges into the sequestered valley where winds the silvery stream. In cold blood, brogues, waders, creel, fishing-rod, and sundries, would prove serious impediments—but it is not so when one strains with light heart towards the goal—

"Where the greedy trout doth lie
Ready for the ensnaring fly."

I have always found the best flies to use here in the spring of the year are, the March Brown, Orange Partridge, Claret-bodied Blue, Blue Dun, Red Spinner, and Jones'

Infallible. Later on—Yellow Partridge, Red Spinner, Red Palmer, Marlow Buzz, Stone-fly, Black Gnat, Cow-dung, and Coch-y-Bondhu. The fish seem to prefer plenty of tinsel about the dressing of the flies. There is no necessity to use very fine tackle, indeed in many respects it is a positive drawback to do so, for the river is so full of stones,



OUR FAVOURITE STRETCH OF WATER ON THE ITHON.

rocks, and stubs, that fine tackle gives the fish every chance of escaping. Doubtless you would get more rises, but with coarse tackle more fish would be grassed.

With plenty of water and a fine breezy morning, we

had a good day's sport by Cefnlllys Church, several of our fish being over a pound in weight.

The country-side were on the move, for was not the May fair being held in a neighbouring village?

These fairs are more religiously observed in the English and Welsh border counties than anywhere else; they are the great red-letter days of their calendar. Nearly every town and village of importance holds them. On these days labourers and farmhouse domestics engage themselves for the year. At the expiration of this period they are once more free, and assemble again at some appointed hiring-place on May fair day to be led into servitude for another period. It reminds one of the slave market at Constantinople. You may see masters and mistresses surveying with a scrutinising gaze those to be hired; there is no maudlin sentiment about the business, strength and health being the great requisites. Those showing the greatest capacity for work, stalwart young men and rosy-faced girls have little difficulty in selling their labour—while those who are puny and weak have to make the best bargains they can for themselves. Some mistresses pinch and prod the girls like cattle before engaging. This relic of the mediæval ages still flourishes amid our nineteenth century civilisation, and it will be long before this great Bank Holiday of rural life dies out. There is no half-heartedness either, in the way John and Mary observe it. 'Tis a sight for the gods—these village fairs! Johnny does not think he has done justice to the day unless he is well drunk at the end of it—and, what with the drink, the drums, the panpipes, and other indescribable tootlings, together with the excitement of shaking hands with the fat lady or skeleton dude, seeing "Siamese twin babes" carefully preserved in spirits of wine, watching a real Hottentot swallow red-hot coal, and being introduced to lambs with two heads, horses with five legs, and other

like monstrosities, patronising shooting galleries, swings, roundabouts, &c., he soon loses all control over himself and runs amuck.

Possibly many of the readers of these lines know what it is to go out the last day of a fishing expedition, with the sole idea of catching fish to take home with you, having cast up



CEFNLLYS CHURCH ON THE ITHON.

in your mind several friends and relations who would be pleased with a brace or two of trout. Accordingly, you set forth with the express object of fishing for the pot. Is there anything more intensely irritating and exasperating than to be unsuccessful when on such a quest? George and Birdie

had each a list of half-a-dozen people to whom they positively must give some fish. We never contemplated a bad day. But somehow, as luck would have it, scarcely a fish was stirring ; not the choicest morsel in the shape of minnow or fly would tempt them. How well I recall this day of fruitless efforts, how I flogged and toiled on with empty basket, hoping against hope, cheerful and uncomplaining. How I sat down to luncheon, miserable and depressed, awaiting the advent of George and Birdie, trusting that the Fates had not refused to smile on them.

“ Caught anything ? ”

“ Nothing ! ”

“ No more have I ! ”

Birdie's mouth twitched and worked convulsively. Evidently he was thinking of his sisters, cousins and aunts who would not dine, after all, on trout from Radnorshire.

It was showery during the afternoon, and in the showers I managed to pick up four or five fish, one of them being a nice fish of 1 lb. 2 oz., but what were these to feed so many ? In a hole under a hollow bank there lies a large trout with a history. In all weather, wet or fine, early in the morning or late in the evening, this fish is to be seen motionless and still in the same spot. Time after time has he been tempted with the choicest flies, maggot, worm, paste and minnow, all to no purpose. He has the reputation of being uncanny, for it is said that he once was caught, but effected his escape by jumping clean out of the fisherman's unfastened basket, and that the irate angler invoked curses on the plucky speckleback which duly took effect.

As I approached the spot where this legendary trout lay, I perceived a fat little gentleman sitting on the bank, just above, violently mopping a rotund face and bald head. In the usual fraternal manner I greeted him in passing. “ Had any sport ? ”

"Not exactly," he replied. "I have been trying all the afternoon after a fine trout in this hole; but I suppose he can't be on the feed, as he won't touch anything."

"My good sir," said I, "haven't you heard of the legendary trout?"

"Yes," he replied, "but for heaven's sake don't tell me that this is the identical fish."

"It's one and the same," I said. He seemed struck all of a heap on hearing this, and literally gasped for breath. Having at last recovered a sufficient supply of that article, he exclaimed, "Good heavens! Here have I been wasting a whole afternoon trying to catch a rascally phantom fish, when I have got a wife and six children at home all expecting a fish dinner to-morrow."

"How many have you caught?" I asked.

"Just three very small ones," he replied.

"Well, then, your wife and six children will have to whistle for their dinner," I said.

"I tell you, I don't go back without them," he shrieked out in despair. "I sent word to my wife to be sure not to get any butcher's meat, as I would give them the treat of a fish dinner of my own catching; and she would go on just awful if I didn't fulfil my promise. Besides, just think of my hungry little ones," and the perspiration broke out afresh upon his brow at the bare thought of his reception in the bosom of his family. "Dash it," he said excitedly, grasping his rod, "I'll fill my pockets with samlet, if everything else fails me; but go home without fish of some kind—no, that I won't," and away the little man rushed with the vision of seven open mouths strong upon him.

The result of our last day's sport was ten fish, and they nearly all small, between three of us—not a promising outlook for those who were calculating on a supply of trout on our return. George appropriated the lot. He has a happy

way of wriggling out of a difficulty in a manner eminently satisfactory to himself. Birdie bribed a native fisherman to get up at five o'clock the next morning and do a bit of fishing on his (Birdie's) behalf. Not a bad stroke of business was this, for a dozen really nice trout were handed over to Birdie, which of course he palmed off as the result of his own skill, and earned imperishable fame thereby.

After dinner we tried to reason the cause of our poor sport—and who so fertile in the invention of excuses as the fisherman? When we started, we voted it to be a perfect fishing morning—now, of course, it was the reverse. But with it all, George assured me that he ought to have brought home several fish over a pound had it not been for some horrible calamity which happened just as the fish were quite played out and about to be captured by the landing-net. There was one fish he hooked and played for half-an-hour, which must have been near 5 lb., and which escaped through some mental aberration occurring just at the critical moment, causing him, so he declares, to turn his rod. I notice, however, that some strange fatality always overtakes George when he has hooked an especially fine trout. The fish he loses are not only perfect beauties, but perfect monsters as regards size. This must be particularly exasperating; only very angelic dispositions could stand the strain of such repeated ill-luck. His patience and control under very trying circumstances are certainly to be admired, and I must freely confess that if such demoniacal luck dogged my footsteps, I should be tempted to give up the gentle art, and seek for sport on some other field where the fickle goddess would condescend to smile upon me.

Well, well, we all have our little failings; but, withal, we are happy in them. We walk out into the moonlight down to the water's edge, smoking our pipes and gazing dreamily into the rippling stream. We feel that a poor day's sport is

better than none at all. "My crown is in my heart, not on my head—not set with diamonds and Indian stones: my crown is called content, a crown it is which seldom kings enjoy"—and as we listen to the water's droning, the distant laughter, and the soft melody of the village concertina that comes floating down from some love-stricken swain, we cry "content" and saunter back to the peace and restfulness of bed. We stretch our weary limbs between the snow-white sheets, and with the music of the murmuring brook still in our ears, dream of other angling grounds where crystal streams lave golden shores, or dreamily meander among the sunny hills—and where, if heaven is to be heaven to us, one source of pleasure amid the busy work of the Fatherland will inevitably be a few off-days spent in casting our flies upon its pure transparent waters.

CHAPTER VII.

TALE OF A BLACK LAMB WITH NO RELATION TO ITS CAUDAL APPENDAGE.

George and his belongings are devotedly attached to animals, and in their menagerie at the present time have five dogs, four cats and two Manx ditto, a dozen rabbits of various breeds and colours, two Belgian hares, parrots, canaries, doves, pigeons, singing thrushes and goldfinches (whose lives are not the happiest owing to the aforesaid cats), pea fowl, guinea fowl, various breeds of poultry, bantams, ornamental ducks, and a few blind mice; in fact, at this moment, I am unable to enumerate the different forms of live stock which are looked upon as especial pets.

George awoke one morning with the brilliant idea that a

black lamb of the pure Welsh mountain breed would be a welcome addition.

"But, my dear fellow," I remonstrated, "think of the bother of lugging a black lamb all the way to Norfolk!"

"Not a bit of trouble," he rejoined, "I should put a chain round its neck and imagine it was a black Newfoundland. It would travel as quiet as a lamb." I don't think George meant this for a joke. He had merely got confused between the dog and the lamb, owing to the strength of his imaginative faculties. So it was finally settled that we should export one from its native wilds.

We had seen plenty of these coal-black specimens about, and in our innocence imagined that the farmers, of whose bad times we had heard so much, would tumble over one another in their eagerness to sell us one, as we were prepared to purchase at a price over the market value.

We accordingly consulted our factotum, the ostler, and were about to give him a roving commission, when, to our astonishment, he shook his head firmly but politely, and absolutely declined to have anything to do with the matter.

We enquired the reason, but could extract nothing more than a solemn shake of the head and "No, indeed, I would rather not."

As we had been ever liberal in the way of tips, we felt rather hurt.

Birdie said, "Well, you're a rum blade."

"Very likely, sur," said the ostler, and disappeared.

Then George launched forth into invective and condemned the ingratitude of the lower orders. He said, "This kind of thing makes one shut up one's pockets and harden one's heart against the poor." George always will rush to conclusions and draw morals. Birdie is far less hasty, and wisely remarked that "There was something more in the ostler's refusal than we wot of."

Several other rustics were approached on the subject, but there was the same mysterious shaking of the head and polite refusal to give any information. "No, indeed; they didn't know sure where we could get one."

We resolved to penetrate the mystery further, and after a deal of badgering and cross questioning, discovered that in the district it was universally considered most unlucky to sell one of these black lambs, and that some horrible calamity was certain to overtake the vendor.

Such a trifle as a ridiculous local superstition would not deter George from obtaining the desire of his heart. He prevailed upon Birdie and myself one evening to go into the bar parlour where several farmers had assembled. For brevity's sake I extract the result of our interview from my note book :—

Tuesday, 9 p.m. Scene, bar parlour, enveloped in clouds of tobacco and cigar smoke. Indescribable jangle of guttural tongues. George clears his throat and h'ms loudly to call attention to the fact that he wishes to make a remark. Amid the lull Ulysses spoke in the most persuasive and courteous tones he could command :—

"Would any of you gentlemen be kind enough to tell me where I could purchase a black lamb?"

His words seemed to fall like a bombshell among the assembled farmers. All pipes removed from mouths and all eyes turned upon us with a deeply-suspicious look. Silence. The occupant of the cosy corner at length gives tongue. "Sell a black lamb!" he exclaims, staring fixedly at George, "no, nor give one away."

His neighbour, sucking hard at a churchwarden pipe, remarks, "I know one chap as solded one and afore the end of the year he hadn't a blimy lamb left, for the maggits had 'em—aye, indeed, every one."

"Yes, sure," chimed in the company, sagely wagging

their heads. Another gentleman expresses his fixed determination to sell his shirt first, which, to judge from the very small portion that was visible, seemed so greasy and dirty as to render it doubtful whether a purchaser at any price could be found. A young farmer, with a well-oiled head of hair, sitting next to Birdie, expressively puts it, "No, indeed —scratch my head first if I would!" The disgust on Birdie's face implies that wild horses would not drag him to undertake such a task as that.

Someone inclined to be quarrelsome inquires, "What do you take us for?" and looks round for approval, evidently thinking he has said a sharp thing.

George shrugs his shoulders and is silent.

Birdie, on the other hand, anxious to have a say on the subject, takes this opportunity to get a word in. He says he deploras such nonsense about black lambs, and even in benighted Wales is surprised to find these superstitions of the mediæval ages in full force. (Didn't know Birdie knew so much about the dark ages.) He goes on in a lighter vein and asks if they had entered into a compact with him of the cloven hoof to reserve for his especial use all lambs born into the world tarred with his own brush.

No one laughs save George.

In no wise disconcerted Birdie goes on to state that in his county all honest shepherds look with special disfavour upon these animals, and that serious damage is often done to the ewes of the flocks by their appearance. In his virtuous county men and animals shrink from them and are thankful to be rid of them.

"Gentlemen," concludes Birdie, "I have a great admiration for the sturdy yeomen of this principality; but I grieve to say this incident has somewhat disenchanted me and I shall leave this place in a day or so a wiser but a sadder man."

After this very reflective speech we think it best to make ourselves scarce. Amid hostile ejaculations we slink out into the evening air, and walk up and down beside the river, deep in thought.

George says we must bow before the inevitable, and think no more of the black lamb. Presently I notice a man dodging in and out of the bushes, apparently watching us. It is startling after recent events, and makes me feel creepy. Is it an emissary sent to wreak summary vengeance upon us? I communicate my suspicions to George. George, with his bull-dog impetuosity, says, "Let me get alongside the snivelling, drivelling idiot, that's all. I'll—"

The nature of his threat did not reach my ears, for at that moment there glided out of the bushes a short, stumpy figure, with bandy legs, dressed in very seedy garments, and confronting George, whispered under his breath, "Sur, will yer give me a few minutes talk."

George, a little nervous, replied, "Certainly, my man ; but say what you've got to say as quickly as possible." Birdie evidently thought that the man was a blind, and that his confederates were lurking in the bushes, for he peered uneasily every now and then behind him.

"It's about the black lambkin," whispered the man. "If yer will say naught about it, and pay a good price, I'll sell yer one." It was a queer sight, the short, bandy farmer and the long-legged George in close confab. The price asked for the lamb is £3. George declines to give more than £2. "Well, split the difference," says the bandy-legged one, and the bargain is concluded. The man agrees to place the lamb ready packed in a crate on the morning of our departure at daybreak, before anyone is stirring. "No one will know how it came there," he added significantly. Clever dodge this ! Packed and labelled—work of the old gentleman—consternation of ostlers—tableau !

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The man was as good as his word. On the morning of our departure I was awakened about 7 a.m. by shouts from George, whose window overlooked the inn-yard. "The lamb's come, and there is such a lark going on." I sprang out of bed to see the fun. There was the black lamb in a crate, baaing piteously, surrounded by a ring of men, women, and children, all gesticulating frantically, evidently in a great state of excitement. The ostler, too, was there, walking round and round it in great perturbation of spirit, shaking and scratching his head, evidently utterly at a loss to account for the apparition.

George, in high glee, gave vent to a loud and unearthly Ha! ha! ha!—like the chuckling of some fiend so often portrayed on the pages of the Lancashire Witches—and then bolted from the window.

The cry had an electrical effect on the crowd. All gazed intently towards the place whence the sound seemed to proceed, but no human form being visible the women and children sent up piteous shrieks and fled precipitately, all save one old woman, who fell on her back promptly and went off into hysterics, kicking her feet frantically into the air as if applying shoe leather to spectral forms around her.

George's yells had unfortunately confirmed their suspicions. After breakfast the ostler came for our luggage. "Well, ostler," I said, "we have got a black lamb after all." "Yes, gentlemen, so I see—but, beg pardin, gentlemen, there will no good come by it. How is it to go to the station, gentlemen?"

"Why, the way it came," sings out George, "whisked away on a broom-handle; there's no mode of conveyance cheaper, quicker, or more comfortable than that."

The lamb was an unmitigated nuisance on our homeward journey. The crate in which it was packed was rickety and fragile, and threatened at every change to

collapse. It required constant attention, and various lengths of cord to keep it from falling to pieces. Never once did that lamb cease its baaing, although George purchased some cabbages and lettuces at Shrewsbury to soothe its sorrow ; but all in vain, for as we sped on our way through murky Staffordshire and on through the Midland meads, its incessant bleating came on our ears with dull monotony, and seemed at each remove a piteous protest at being torn from its mountain home.

It still lives and thrives, but resolutely refuses to have anything to do with its Norfolk kinsmen. It roams solitary and unfriended at its own sweet will. One day it nearly brought about the death of old Charles, the gardener. He was drilling peas, when there suddenly appeared between his legs a cold, black demoniacal face, as he afterwards related. He at once concluded it was the Devil. Why he arrived at such a conclusion, I cannot say ; but the fact remains that he did, and received such a shock to the nervous system that he took to his bed and hovered for long between life and death. He has, I am thankful to say, recovered ; but the sight of that lamb revives unpleasant memories and brings on the old pains.

And so ended a few days' fishing in Radnorshire—days of unclouded happiness which one can look back upon with joy and recognise that all was innocent, and thank God for life which in such hours seems well worth the living.

In the Wilds of Donegal.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE can I go for an inexpensive holiday with entire change of scene, complete rest, good fishing, lovely scenery, and not overrun by my fellow-countrymen? This was the question I meditated over the beginning of June, and before the end of the month I had decided it should be Donegal, in the Emerald Isle, provided I could get anyone to accompany me.

"Go to Donegal!" said an old acquaintance, "no thanks; I've no desire to get a bullet through my gizzard!"

"Why, the elections are just coming on; you're sure to be potted at," said another.

To stay at an hotel was far from my intention, but to retire to a secluded spot among the wild Glen Alla hills, where a small house had been placed at my disposal some four or five miles from Ramelton and Rathmullan respectively. Around me would lie Loughs Fern, Keel, Dhu, Salt, and Kindrum, and the Lennan River, and thus I could make acquaintance with the trout in these loughs, of the fishing in which I could get no information, not even from the great Hi Regan himself, save of the Lennan and Lough Fern. As my motive was to explore and get off the beaten tracks of Gweedore and Dunglow, some companions for the lonely house among the wild, bare hills were a *sine quâ non*. A line to F. R. B. and his wife, who I knew were looking

out for a holiday resort, describing house, surroundings, and motives, settled the question.

"We're game, if you really mean it," was the reply.

That's the answer I like—no shilly-shallying, no beating about the bush. Beware of leaning on that broken reed type of character, "first he would and then he wouldn't, then he said he really couldn't," or else ten to one you will have to go on your expedition alone. So, having procured



LOUGH DHU.

circular tourists' tickets for the North of Ireland, we set off in high spirits the last Wednesday in breezy June for Fleetwood.

Having reserved a third-class compartment by taking the extra seats, we expected to be unmolested, but an irascible old lady, who objected to our appropriating a whole compartment, and to whom the label "Reserved" acted as a

red rag to a bull, tugged at the handle of our carriage door until she was blood-red in the face, shook her umbrella threateningly on every available opportunity, and finally, as a parting shot, informed the guard at the top of her voice that she would take care to report such an iniquity to the authorities. We were sorry to have irritated so venerable and respectable a lady, but we were acting strictly within our rights, and therefore undisturbed both in body and mind. The bland and smiling countenance of F. R. B. is peculiarly attractive to the feminine eye, and I imagine that this accounts for the strenuous exertions of the aforesaid lady to enter our compartment.

It was a lovely evening ; the sea as calm as the proverbial mill pond as we paced the deck of one of those comfortable boats on the Fleetwood and Belfast line, ordered our dinner, secured our berths, and made ready to enjoy ten hours on the briny.

"Don't miss Belfast Lough," were the captain's last words to us, as after a pipe and a chat we sought our cabins for a few hours' sleep. Before 6 a.m. we were on deck gazing wistfully at the "poor distracted country" whose hills and vales seemed to smile at us in the morning sun, and bid us a loving welcome. "Oh, Erin, thou art a gay deceiver," muttered F. R. B. under his breath with a sigh.

Barely two hours remained for us to obtain a peep of Belfast, which the top of a tram-car afforded us ; then on to famous Londonderry, five hours by rail, rendered somewhat tedious by stops at almost every station, but relieved the latter part of the journey by some lovely scenery along Lough Foyle and the coast. Two hours' stay at Derry was scant time in which to look over this historic city, especially when the inner man has to be refreshed ; we could but stand and gaze at its massive walls, and recall the forgotten past, and wonder if the boys of Derry would ever

man those walls again, and prove themselves worthy scions of their illustrious forefathers.

But there was little space for dreaming, two cars were awaiting us—one for ourselves, the other for our luggage, and away we drove for the light railway which runs up to Lough Swilly and along its shore as far as Buncrana. At Fahan (pronounced Fawn) we alighted and got on board



LOUGH SWILLY.—VIEW FROM OUR HOUSE, SHOWING FERRY STEAMER FROM FAHAN TO RATHMULLAN IN THE DISTANCE.

the steamer which plies to and fro between there and Rathmullan. Here you are in wild highland scenery, and as you cross sweet Lough Swilly the mountains tower above you on all sides—a rare good place, by the way, is this for wild-fowl, and during our stay we saw plenty of wild duck, teal, widgeon, curlew, plover, &c., while its waters seem to be

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alive with salmon and white trout making for the Lennan and Letterkenny rivers.

At Rathmullan two cars again were requisitioned, and away we sped on the last stage of our journey along the wooded shore, and then up, up, up among the wild Glen Alla hills, with here and there a whitewashed cabin and a vivid patch of potatoes, flax and corn nestling among them, and alone relieving their rugged grandeur, while the Swilly's waters we could see gleaming down below, as, having arrived at our quarters, we washed away the dust and prepared for the evening meal.

We had been commended to the care of Jimmy Graffin, the local fisherman, who duly presented himself the next morning to await orders. Jimmy presents at first sight a strange, weird appearance, with his scraggy grey locks floating in the breeze and weather-beaten face adorned with a red bottle nose, but he is a real treasure to a sportsman, knows every inch of the country, every lough, river, and stream; and seemingly everyone in the county of Donegal knows "dear old Jimmy," as Mrs. B. delighted to call him, to judge by the greetings accorded him wherever we went. Never did time hang heavy on our hands, even when the fish refused to sport, with Jimmy by our side—a true type he was of the garrulous Irishman, and we would listen with wrapt attention to his marvellous stories, and drink them in like a parched and thirsty soil does the summer rain.

Here is a specimen for which we make no extra charge.

Jimmy, armed with a duck gun, was shooting on the banks of Lough Fern. He discharged the deadly weapon into a flock of teal and killed nineteen, and in so doing the ramrod flew out and gave a salmon its quietus; the recoil was so great (and no wonder) that Jimmy was knocked on to a furze bush under which two hares happened to be

sitting—both of these were killed. Thus Jimmy's one shot accounted for nineteen teal, two hares, and a salmon—a curiously mixed bag.

In answer to some inquiries Jimmy recommended us to go up to Lough Dhu, twenty minutes' walk up "the hulls," where we should get among "some grand little trouts." Provisions had to be obtained from Ramelton in the afternoon, so we were only able to fish until 2 p.m. We learnt by experience that an Irishman's mile may mean anything up to five English miles, and "twenty minutes' walk over the hulls" turned out to be forty, and a rare good tramp for two out-of-condition Londoners. F. R. B., puffing and blowing like a grampus, drew a smile from Jimmy, but that smile cost Jimmy dearly, and the time came when the smile appeared on the other face, and poor old Jimmy, with faltering footsteps, dragged his slow length along.

Lough Dhu is a small sheet of water about half-a-mile long and three hundred yards broad—the water being intensely clear, for it is all spring. The trout are quite pink, and the most delicately flavoured of any I have yet come across; but they are certainly bad risers, and you will scarcely ever catch more than a dozen of them. A half-pound fish will give you as much trouble as a pounder in another lough—they are game to the last. They run from 3 ozs. to $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs., but a fish of the latter weight is a great exception. One was caught by a gentleman from Letterkenny, the only person who fished the lough during our stay—and then only for a day—weighing 2 lbs. 3 ozs., and a rare-shaped fish it was, too.

The large fish only on very occasional days rise to a fly, and as weed in the bottom prevents trolling, you have little chance of getting hold of the big ones. A dark claret, and any fly with a wasp body, are the most killing, not forgetting the universal Hare's Ear, without which no Irishman thinks

your cast complete. It is his god of flies, which he swears by in all weathers and waters.

Our fish this morning were all caught on a small fly with a wasp body ; but the sky was clear and the water bright, so, having caught enough for dinner, we adjourned early in the forenoon.

We recommend anyone staying in the neighbourhood to give Lough Dhu a trial, if only for the gameness and delicate flavour of its trout, the latter caused, so Jimmy avers, by their feeding on a peculiar snail at the bottom. There is a private boat on the lough, the use of which can easily be obtained for the asking. Ramelton, where there is a good and clean hotel, is distant between three and four miles. Take the finest tackle with you, choose a cloudy, but not a cold day, with a gentle breeze, and you will not be disappointed.

In the evening, after our drive to Ramelton, we noticed some fish rising in a large sheet of water where the little burn which runs through our garden had been dammed up for some purpose or other. From 7 to 8 p.m. we threw our flies over them, and obtained several good fish. But it was almost an impossibility to eat them after those from Lough Dhu ; they were tough and flavourless, and yet, I suppose, they had once been sweet burn trout.

CHAPTER II.

THE LENNAN.

Saturday, July 2nd, dawned amid pelting rain. There was no need to get out of bed and peer through the window to ascertain what kind of weather we were to be favoured

with, for the pitiless squalls of rain and wind rattled the window frames with increasing energy and moaned dismally round our gabled domicile. F. R. B. and his wife heard the ominous sounds, chuckled at the thought of an hour's respite, turned themselves over, and soon were sound asleep again, to be rudely awakened by a hard-hearted wretch shouting, "Get up, you sluggards! Wet or fine, we must be on the Lennan by ten o'clock!"

So soporific was the Donegal air, that F. R. B. always caught, with the despairing clutch of a drowning man, at a wet morning as an excuse for the extension of the hour of sleep, while his partner in life would take a further extension in the evening, after dinner, and would needlessly alarm herself by dropping her book on the floor and then springing up with a terrified air, having dreamt that the ceiling had fallen in.

It is certainly difficult to know how to spend the evening in an out-of-the-way place fishing. The lightest and most salutary form of literature does not do at all. I find myself gradually lapsing into a comatose condition, however interesting my book may be, and, while in this state, I have a hazy idea that a particular spot in one leg is getting unpleasantly warm—gradually growing hotter and hotter—until at last I jump with a yell from my chair to find I have dropped my cigar into my lap and burnt a hole in my trousers. Of course, the others think this particularly humorous, and take the opportunity of moralising on the subject.

F. R. B. made a point of reading the papers—there is no disguising the fact that he was in deadly earnest about this, for was it not election time, and he a great politician?—but, alas! well-meaning soul, I don't think he got much beyond the leading article. He would begin to blink and wink, and nod his head backwards and forwards, and make

bad shots at his mouth with his cigar, and then fitfully start up to find out what was the matter—where his mouth had got to. Then, having satisfied himself on this point, and having contentedly drawn a whiff or two, his head would slowly sink down on his chest, his eyes would finally close, and, without an effort, he would transfer himself to the mythical land of Nod, while his cigar, in high dudgeon at his sleepy neglect, would drop out of his hand and roll about on the carpet, evidently considering whether it should set the house on fire by way of revenge. After a time he would awaken to have another whiff, when, on putting his fingers to his lips, and finding nothing there in the shape of a weed, he would stare at his empty hand with a look of indignation and surprise, and then adopt a very undignified position on his hands and knees, ferreting about under his chair for the missing article. On another occasion I have seen the cigar drop down the coat sleeve of a slumbering fisherman. Ah, if you could only have seen the expeditious manner in which that young man sprang up and began shaking his arm about, using very unpleasant expressions the while, how you would have shrieked with laughter !

Perhaps the prettiest picture is presented when F. R. B. is smoking a pipe, and lapses into dreamland. The pipe gradually drops from its horizontal position, until the stem would be sticking up somewhere in the roof of his mouth, and the bowl reclining gracefully on the edge of his chin, conveying to an outsider the idea that he was a thoroughly dissipated reprobate. No; reading after dinner was a fraud and delusion after a day's fishing in Donegal—a mild game of cards, say halfpenny nap (this is not meant for a joke), is more suitable to the climate, and to the fumes and comfort of a peat fire, which possibly acted as an opiate on us all.

We were not on the water till 11 o'clock. Our car was round at 9 a.m., but it was half-an-hour later before we finally set out for Ramelton, situated at the mouth of the Lennan, a distance of four miles and a half from Glen Alla. Betsy, the mare, is not always in the humour to go, a wet morning having the same peculiar tendency on her as on F. R. B. Wallace, our car driver, knows well the little peculiarities of his steed, and informed us that she always went best to a wedding. She would fly along at a tremendous pace on this errand, "Yes, surely she would," though how she ascertained her destination was not revealed to us. Possibly Wallace, who was always whispering soft nothings in her ear, added, on harnessing her, "Arrah, pardee Betsy, it's a wedding you're bound for, bedad!" We were further told that Betsy was always supplied with "a wee drap of whusky" on such occasions. At the last ceremony she had been given as much as a noggin, which made her perfectly inebriated. Consequently, she indulged in several equine evolutions, such as turning round in the shafts, putting her feet on the driver's seat, and affectionately hugging old Wallace—playfully skipping over a stone wall, and finishing up by rolling into various ditches as "tapsy as a doornail," her master facetiously added. With tears in our eyes we begged to be allowed to accompany master and steed to the next wedding. "Yes, surely," was the reply, and hence we can guarantee that this effect of whisky on Betsy is not overdrawn.

Wallace claims to be of royal descent, and without doubt his title is sound enough—a scion of the illustrious Wallace of Scotland—for when evil days came to the poor country, his forefathers escaped from the land of their birth disguised as a wandering troupe of nigger minstrels and settled in Ulster. Even now this descendant of illustrious forefathers would make up as a very respectable Christy. At present he

has not a particle of hair on that spot where the wool ought to grow—we subjected his head to the microscope and could not detect one solitary capillary adjunct. I must not mislead the reader by making him imagine that being “bald as a coot” is hereditary in this branch of royalty—it was caused by a severe attack of influenza. We inquired particularly into the antecedents of this interesting case from Jiminy, an unbiassed witness, as Wallace had told us that originally he had “a graand crop of ’air and bushy whuskers.”

Will the *Lancet* kindly make a note of this effect of influenza attested by many witnesses? .

Ah! amid the gilded magnificence of this crowded city, we sit and sigh for the companionship of Jimmy the ’cute, and Wallace the bald. We have learnt a thing or two from them.

Ramelton reached, we seek out Mr. Stewart, and readily obtain permission to fish the Lennan during our stay from above Carrick Bridge. Below the bridge there is a private salmon fishery, barely a mile in extent. The Lennan rises by Kilmacreen, and runs into Lough Fern—this part of it being locally known as the Kilmacreen river—then it comes out of Lough Fern again, and runs into the Swilly at Ramelton, from Lough Fern to the Swilly being about six miles. It has not a good reputation for brown trout, although we caught one or two very nice fish. It is excellent for white trout, but they had not come up during our stay, and a good number of grilse and salmon are taken from its waters. As an ideal stream it is far too sluggish, and we should advise anyone fishing it to begin at Tulla Bridge and fish to Lough Fern, or *vice versa*, where there is some broken water, but to leave the stretch from Tulla Bridge to Carrick Bridge alone, unless they have plenty of time on hand. The Kilmacreen part of it we did not try.

How it did rain and blow this day! I've fished in all kinds of weather, but for squalls of wind and driving rain three days' experience of Donegal beats the record. Only by skilful manœuvring could one persuade the flies to rest on the water for a second, the next moment they would be embracing some overhanging branch or whirling round in mid-air, while, with the water running down one's back and the cape of the mackintosh blown up over one's head, our first day on the Lennan was hardly one of unalloyed pleasure. Even our bread and cheese was soaked and uneatable, smoking was out of the question, a "wee drap" now and then was our only solace. We managed to get a few nice trout, but none over a pound, and these not without much searching through our fly-book, for wasp and claret bodies were not on the *menu*. Rather late in the day we discovered that the fish were nuts on a fly with an apple-green body—this and the Hare's Ear were the most killing.

Sunday, July 3rd, was dismally wet and cold; but, arrayed in our best, we attended Glen Alla Church, a tiny place of worship built by the owner of the soil, for the Church of England has a strong colony here. The congregation, numbering from twenty to thirty, consisted of nearly all men at both services, the fair sex being poorly represented, which was a novelty to us. Nor was this attributable to the weather, but to the fact that the women had to stay at home to keep the cows and geese out of the corn.

We were rather alarmed at the end of the service, for scarcely had "his Riverence" uttered the last words of the blessing, than the congregation sprang to their feet and fairly ran off. F. R. B. said he fully expected to see his Riverence bolt after them, and was rather disappointed that this did not take place, as it would have been a pretty tableau. Mrs. B. had kindly undertaken to preside at the

organ, and had looked up a very sweet recessional voluntary, but, as the organ-blower had deserted his post and set off at a hundred yards racing pace to catch up his retreating *confrères*, Mrs. B. was left helpless and alone, staring round in mute astonishment at so Irish a proceeding.

Monday, July 4th, was a wild day—not much rain, but fearful gusts of wind. So we spent the day fishing the burn which runs through our garden, emptying itself a mile and a half down into the Swilly. Plenty of trout there were here, and we could always catch a dish for breakfast and



THE BURN WHICH RAN THROUGH OUR GARDEN.

dinner, and what are more delicious than burn trout? But when the waters were rising rare good fish could be caught, half-pounders by no means uncommon, while lower down, where the burn widens out and joins the Swilly, a white trout or two might be added to your basket. F. R. B. distinguished himself this day by hooking and playing his terrier for a good ten minutes. "Tip," delighted at seeing her master landing the specklebacks, signified her joy by

jumping and barking around him, and got hung up in the Stewart tackle, and then made off across the burn with yells which echoed from hill to hill. Suffice it to say she was handled as coolly and scientifically as a salmon, and eventually landed.

CHAPTER III.

LOUGH KEEL.

It is true of Donegal that "it is ever showered upon."

Our first week's experience was not edifying, for it was a week of rain and hurricanes. Jimmy said, "It's na use a feeshing when it's pooffy," and we thought he was about right, for the trout won't even rise in the mill dam now, and our sport has been confined to the burn for some days. But we call it something more than "pooffy" when every five minutes the wind rises to a gale, accompanied by a driving deluge of rain from the N.E. We have lapsed into gloomy, morose, and melancholy men, and think things unutterable, as we look through the window and view the leaden sky, and listen to the wind whistling round the house, and groaning dismally in the chimney. The peat fire is going all day, and thankful we are for its cheery blaze and warmth. Nevertheless, we all turn out and brave the elements to spoil the burn of its specklebacks — even Mrs. B. has got proficient in the art of worming, and takes her share in keeping the house supplied with fish. Once, owing to the fury of the wind and the slippery banks, she landed in three feet of water, much to the astonishment of a respectable trout, which had led a quiet, humdrum exist-

ence for a number of years in this particular hole, and was somewhat nonplussed at the sudden appearance of what it, no doubt, conceived to be a mermaid.

Jimmy, who had seen the catastrophe, laughingly rejoined, "Na, not a marmaid, but a banshee."

"Did you ever see a banshee, Jimmy?"

"Yes, sure," he replied.



LOUGH KEEL.

"Where was that?" I inquired, thirsting for information on the subject.

"Stouffed in a musaum," replied the unabashed Celt.

Early one morning another local celebrity appeared on the scene—a certain Pat Fisher by name—as garrulous an Irishman as ever wore a pipe in his hat. Pat was born and bred on the banks of the Lough Fern, and earned his liveli-

hood by tying flies. Hearing of our arrival in the neighbourhood he placed in his pocket the whole of his stock, together with a bit of blarney, and made off for Glen Alla, arriving there about breakfast time.

"Pat Fisher is waiting to see you, sur."

"Oh, tell him to come round to the hall door."

But Pat was wise in his generation, and knew that a Saxon was a better man for business and of a more lamb-like disposition on a full stomach than an empty one, so the maid returned, saying, "Sure Pat will just bide a wee till after breakfast, as he has a long sarmon on fishery to gie yer." This was ominous, but after breakfast, having lighted our pipes, we strolled into the kitchen to interview the afore-said Pat—and, my word! a sarmon we did have. The moment we faced him, he lapsed into a "jabberation" at the rate of fifty words a second. It appeared inconceivable that the human tongue should so abuse its power without some retribution overtaking it in the shape of paralysis.

It was well-nigh impossible to follow the eloquent and impassioned Pat, but I gathered that he was tracing his pedigree and giving historical reminiscences of the place, year, month, day, and hour of his birth, with a sketch of his career (and a very romantic one it was, to say the least of it) up to the present moment. After a good forty minutes' run on such topics he produced his flies, and his eloquence grew more and more impassioned as he swore by all his gods that these and these only would catch fish on Loughs Fern and Keel.

Well, in comparison with the beautifully dressed flies of modern days to which we were accustomed, Pat Fisher's appeared the very clumsiest productions, and set up, too, on the very coarsest gut. We may be pardoned, when at first sight our well-trained eyes pronounced them "piffle," and we thought we had done our duty nobly in relieving

Pat of four or five shillings' worth, for we never expected them to be put to any use. Pat, however, was not satisfied with our outlay, and we heard he went away abusing us, doubtless resolving to put a bullet through those cursed Saxons whenever he should fall in with them on the banks of some secluded lough.

Now we own to have been absolutely mistaken in our estimate of Pat's flies. Never again will we look down on local productions; we should not have done so in this instance, for experience has taught us the folly of so doing, but these were the roughest articles our eyes had ever gazed upon. However, they proved to be invaluable to us, as will be hereafter related, and the garrulous Celt became our esteemed mentor.

We had asked Jimmy to give us his opinion as to which lough held the biggest trout, and he had replied, without a moment's hesitation, "In Lough Keel there are some grand troots."

Through the kindness of the Countess of Leitrim we had permission to fish Loughs Keel and Kindrum whenever we wished, so at the first lull of the elements Wallace popped Betsy into the car, and under the guidance of Jimmy we set off for Lough Keel, a distance of eight miles, amid wild highland scenery, over a desperately bad road the latter part of the way. As you descend from the Glen Alla hills there is the lovely Mulroy Bay with its numerous islets and creeks gleaming down below you.

"Are there many white trout in Mulroy, Jimmy?"

"Sure;" he replied, "but for every one in Mulroy there are a hundred in the Swilly."

We never passed Mulroy without Jimmy insisting on this fact, but we had no opportunity of testing its correctness, although I fancy that as Jimmy's livelihood was earned on the Swilly he was not without prejudice in the matter.

We had to get out and walk up and down the hills, and as one occurs every hundred yards or so, we were in a constant whirl of acrobatic performances, jumping on and off the car when in motion, so as to waste as little time as possible. Wallace, the bald, in spite of his years, from previous training, was an expert in this branch of athletics, while F. R. B., not to be outdone, after a little preliminary practice, which tried the springs to their utmost, acquired the activity of a kitten, and jeered at my feeble efforts to assume the character of a running footman.

At Milford, Betsy had breathing time, while F. R. B. ransacked the place for a *Londonderry Sentinel*, to see the latest phase in the elections, and bought a huge box of matches as a present for Jimmy. The latter smoked some kind of twist which he ragged with his teeth in the first instance, and as after this process it required re-lighting every half minute, and he had always carefully left his matches at home on the dresser, and borrowed ours in turn, and quickly used them all up, we seized the bull by the horns and made it part of our business to keep him supplied with lights. The Milfordites were in a state of excitement about the coming elections; in the town the Protestants were easily in the ascendant, but they would be swamped by the votes of the country people.

"What do you think!" said an excited Presbyterian. "Father So-and-so told Murphy if he didn't vote right, he'd turn him into a mouse.

"Poor Murphy in a fearful state of agitation goes to bed, and in his dreams keeps holloaing 'It's a moose!—it's a moose!'

"'Bedad, Murphy,' says his wife, 'lave off a-moosing.'

"'Sure, Bridget, an' I will, if yer'll go and lock the cat up.'"

The road past Milford is a dangerous one to travel along

on a dark night, as in many places there is nothing to prevent your falling over one or two charming precipices. In one spot a cabin is built under the road as you turn a sharp angle, its thatched roof being just on a level with it. A belated traveller driving home at midnight, mistook the thatch for the road and drove his horse and car straight over it, much to the alarm of the sleeping inmates, who thought that the end of all things had at last arrived; and so I should think it had, as far as the driver and his horse and car were concerned.

It was in this neighbourhood that Lord Leitrim met with a violent death, of which we had a vivid description *en route* as we toiled onwards to the trysting-place. Betsy got slower and slower in spite of a variety of novel sounds in the way of encouragement, but at last, after an hour and twenty minutes, we sighted the lough lying in the hollow of the hills—a nice stretch of water about two miles in length, with many projecting rocks dotted about.

After a short interview with Annie McGiddikie for the loan of the boat, the only one here, we commenced operations. With regard to “the graand troots,” I was a bit sceptical, for native information is not always reliable, as I found on several occasions to my cost; but before we had gone twenty yards all doubts were set at rest, and incontestable proof supplied that Jimmy was a valuable cicerone and worthy of credence. As the latter leisurely propelled us over some sunken rocks I got fast in something big, but before I had time to speculate as to the size, a grand trout, some 3 lb. or 4 lb. in weight, leapt into the air, and then, to the accompaniment of the reel’s sweet music, made off at a terrific pace. Checked in his flight, he treated us to another high jump performance, and then make back at the same rate of speed for the boat. Now we had a rod out bow and stern trolling with flies, and these, so sudden was the on-

slaught, we had been unable to get in. "Reel up! reel up;" shouted Jimmy; and so I did as fast as mortal man could, but that trout was one too many for me, and was under the boat and round the lines like a flash of lightning, in spite of Jimmy's exertions to keep the boat away. Yet once more I felt him, and then the line slackened, and I knew the worst had happened.

Jimmy's sympathy was something, for, although he spoke not, he looked unutterably sad, and chewed a quid for solace. However, three or four nice half-pounders found their way into the net before F. R. B. landed a nice conditioned fish of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb.

In the interval for lunch, a native, who might have been related to the man "all tattered and torn," so ragged were his garments, interviewed us, and gave an alarming report as to the size of the fish, declaring there were plenty of ten and twelve pounders. Seeing my rod on the bank, he picked it up with a nonchalant air, and proceeded to give me a lesson in catching Lough Keel trout. The temerity of my tattered friend fairly made me gasp for breath. So I had travelled all these miles to be schooled in the art of fly-fishing in the wilds of Donegal by an Arcadian shepherd; and there was F. R. B. coiled up behind a rock, blood-red in the face with suppressed laughter. After twenty minutes' instruction without a semblance of a rise, he informed me that we should do "na good, for the wind was wrong." I courteously thanked him and withdrew.

My tattered mentor was out of his reckoning for once, if he had never been so before. Immediately we had commenced again, I hooked and landed a splendid fish of $2\frac{3}{4}$ lbs., after fifteen minutes' excitement and rowing about the lough, while F. R. B. got two half-pounders together on his trolling flies, as we were chasing the big one. Lucky, indeed, were we to secure them, all three, without mishap. Several

others we picked up in the course of the afternoon, between one or two pounds, besides several smaller ones—and let us give Pat Fisher his due, for his flies were accountable for the majority, especially his hare's ears and wasp bodies.

The wind had got up and made a regular sea on the lough, the waves sometimes breaking over the bows and giving me a cold bath. So we decided to try a troll with artificial minnows, I with a Devon, and F. R. B. with a Phantom. At this we were decidedly out of luck, for although we had from eight to ten runs with grand fish, we only secured four. The Phantom attracted a beauty which must have scaled over 4 lbs., and yet it managed to get free up against the boat. Still, we had no reason to complain, for eighteen fish, from 2½ lbs. to ½ lb. lay in our boat, and we voted Lough Keel to be as good a trouting lough as we could desire to fish, and that not many days should elapse before we again essayed our luck upon its waters. Just before landing a wild, weird figure came running down the hillside, gesticulating frantically, and shouting some unintelligible gibberish ending in a "whirr-hoo." It was the now highly-esteemed Pat Fisher. On he came, yelling "Raats baack ! raats baack !" and thrusting a greasy fly book in my face. We were at a loss to place any meaning to his words, but it turned out that Pat's *specialité* for the lough was a fly made of the hair of a rat's back. We invested largely and saved our hides, and then sought out Wallace and his steed, to go through a second series of evolutions, on and off the car, before we arrived, hungry and tired out, at our mountain home.

CHAPTER IV.

LOUGH FERN.

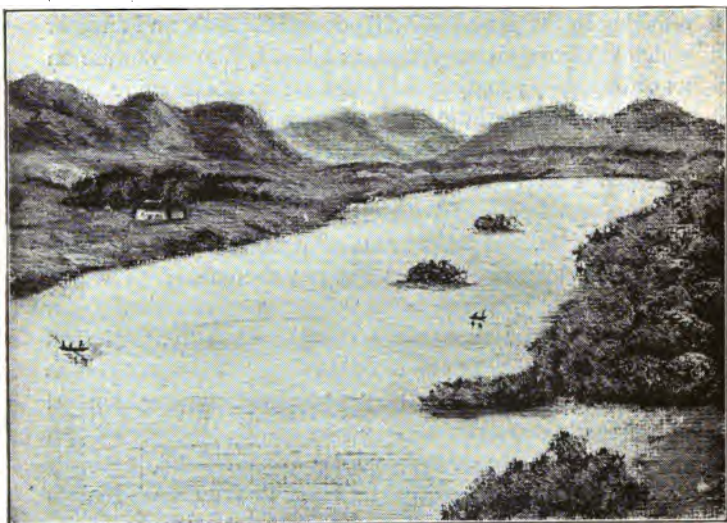
I have said that native information as regards the sporting capabilities of the various loughs in this neighbourhood was not always reliable, and this was especially the case as far as the minor ones were concerned. Startling were the accounts given to us of the trout in some small loughs close at hand, rejoicing in the names of Ballyboo and Colomb, and another which shall remain unwritten, as I hardly like to venture on its orthography; and, as we had read in some guide book that the numerous little loughs in this district were "simply stuffed with fish," we did not fail to give them a trial. However, our efforts were absolutely fruitless, and, in each case, natives, who frequented their banks, flatly contradicted the former reports, and told us that what fish had formerly been there, were long since driven away by the eels.

A veritable "bogie man" is the eel in this district.

When St. Patrick banished snakes from the distressful country, he ought to have extended his edict to their cousins of the water. As it is, the natives here are great on eel stories, and one might collect enough material on the subject to fill a very respectable and readable volume, certainly startling enough to satisfy the most fastidious of modern tastes.

Wallace told us of one that used to frequent the lough with the unwritten name just above our house, which was the terror of the neighbourhood, and whose body was as large as that of a cart horse. Several times the men of Glen Alla, like the heroes of old, had determined to rid the neighbourhood of the monster, and had armed themselves with every available weapon, and repaired to its lair, without, however, effecting their purpose. One day the news was brought that the creature had endeavoured to navigate the

burn in a flood, and was wedged in firmly between the banks and quite unable to move. Once more the would-be deliverers of their country buckled on their armour, determined on slaughter, and set forth on their patriotic mission, but again were they foiled in their attempt. For the brute no sooner caught sight of his would-be destroyers, than he made one terrific effort to free himself from his unenviable



LOUGH FERN.

position, leapt into the air with a roar, and disappeared in an adjoining bog, while the ground trembled and quaked for miles around.

We heard, too, from another source that this same monster had the audacity to pursue a man on horseback, so promiscuous and daring were its raids, and that the poor fellow was only saved from a horrible death by the fleetness of his

stead. No wonder that unruly boys caved in at once at the mere mention of such a "bogie man," or that it was impossible to get the eels skinned and cooked, which we happened to catch, when the burn was in a spate.

Ghosts and banshees were clean out of the running here.

Then we were shown another small lough which our guide assured us was inhabited by several enormous eels which barked like dogs, and could be seen of an evening swimming about with big trout in their mouths—but there, I have said enough to illustrate the native horror of the harmless water snake—yet I should be interested to know if any of my readers have come across like stories in other districts, or whether they are confined to a corner of Donegal.

On July 9th we started for Lough Fern—"Sweet Lough Fern" as "Hi Regan" calls it.

The wind was high, but still the elements seemed to have settled down a bit; this was necessary before essaying a lough which is very soon discoloured; accounted for probably by the fact of the Lennan flowing through the lower portion of it. The fishing is free, and includes salmon and brown trout, with a few white trout late in the season. It is about a mile and a-half in length and six hundred yards broad in the widest place, situated about one mile from Milford.

Here, of course, we have "an easy," to do some shopping and have a chat with the Milfordites. We love now a gossip with our fellow creatures when we have a chance, as we never did before. F. R. B., in the middle of a political discussion, feels a hand laid on his back, while a soft, melodious voice whispers in his ear, "Raat's baack."

It was the voice of the ubiquitous Pat Fisher, intent on business.

"No, Pat, not Lough Keel to-day—it's Fern we're bound for."

“Begorra! It’s Fern is it, and hare’s ears bedad?” and out came the well-worn fly-book, with an oration on its contents.

Milford is not favoured with tourists, but to-day two undoubted ones, with red guide-books in their hands, had brought all the inhabitants to their doors—it takes less to collect a crowd in an Irish country town than in London, and this is saying a good deal—while a couple on their honeymoon were pointed out to us—the bridegroom’s third experience. Happy man!

F. R. B. startled me by saying, “That man must be bilious.”

“Good gracious,” I replied, “what on earth makes you think so?”

“Reminds me of a friend,” he answered, “who apologised for entering the united state the third time, but the fact was, he explained, that when a widower he always felt so bilious.”

On we go, along a really level bit of road, and finally alight at the farm and grocery store of Mr. Chambers, who also has boats on hire. Here one can find pleasant fishing quarters, the house being prettily situated on the hillside, overlooking the lough, and there is generally some fisherman in occupation.

I rigged up a medium salmon cast, with a Fiery Brown as leader, and two trout flies as droppers. Thus equipped, I fancied I should be in the way of catching anything I came across. It was a mistake all the same, for the trout are exceedingly shy, and require to be lured with the finest tackle. No; here I should say that it is best to settle in your mind what you are going to fish for, salmon or trout, but setting to work to catch anything will probably end in your catching nothing.

At the outset let me say at once I was disappointed with

the lough, nor could I see anything in its surroundings to earn such a title as "Sweet Lough Fern." It is now undoubtedly over-fished, and sharing the fate of all free water. There were always five or six boats out, indeed more on favourable days. Jimmy, too, had no great opinion of it, it was not to be mentioned in the same breath with Lough Keel, although he could remember the day when both salmon and trout were fairly plentiful, and good baskets, as regards quantity, were taken. But he is emphatic in his declaration that he has never seen a trout over a pound taken out of the lough. Our experience certainly confirms this, for although the trout we caught were nice sizable ones, half-pounders or so, yet we never got hold of anything over a pound, nor did we see any in the baskets of other anglers. As regards the salmon, they were particularly wary, doubtless from the fact that every likely spot was haunted by native sportsmen, casting their flies over them day after day with very varying luck. Old habitués who reside near and seize every opportunity, consider themselves very fortunate if they catch eight or ten in a season. One was caught during our stay weighing 19 lbs., and, by the way it was talked of in the neighbourhood, we were led to believe that fish of that size were few and far between. On Jimmy's advice we confined ourselves chiefly to the trout, both casting and trolling our flies, and we obtained a nice basket of level fish.

Towards evening of our first day we saw a salmon rise on the edge of some rushes and reeds, and I threw over him with a Fiery Brown, which is, I believe, the most killing fly. At the fourth essay I was into him, and a pretty dance he gave us. F. R. B., who had relieved Jimmy at the oars, in the excitement of the chase caught a delightful crab, his head disappearing among the trout at the bottom of the boat, while his feet were kicking frantically in mid air.

Jimmy cast a reproachful look at the topsy-turvy figure, and helped to right him, but shook his head very sorrowfully, for he looked on the catastrophe as an omen of failure. And so it was—for the salmon made for the head of the Lennan and got inextricably hung up in the weeds, which all those who have fished that spot know too well abound there. Jimmy never failed to mention the loss, and glanced sorrowfully and reproachfully at the author of that redoubtable crab.

Whether the other fishermen had binoculars with them I know not, but they crowded down upon us from all parts, some to condole, others to give sage advice as to what we ought to have done under the circumstances, while one gentleman delivered a short lesson on "How to play a salmon," evidently learnt up from some text-book.

The shooting on the lough is also free; and to judge by the number of wild duck and teal we saw, good sport ought to be had, but doubtless they are pretty well harassed by gunners during the season, and become as wary and shy as the trout and salmon. Jimmy promised to show us good sport, both here and on the Swilly, if we would come over later; and his tales on the subject have made us eager to ascertain whether Lough Fern would afford us more sport with the duck gun than the rod.

Jimmy told us of an incident in duck shooting which only happens once in the lifetime of a chosen few. The scene was his cabin at the close of day—he was boiling something in a pot on the fire, when down the chimney came a whirring noise as of wild duck flying over. A glance up the wide and smoky aperture confirmed this, and, seizing his loaded gun, which stood close at hand, he fired, and was unexpectedly rewarded by seeing two plump ducks fall gracefully down the chimney into the boiling water.

"And I suppose," said F. R. B., with an innocent face

but a twinkle in his eye, "I suppose that the flame of the fire sizzled their feathers off as they came down?"

"Indaad you're just roight there," said our friend and mentor, and from the bows of the boat there came an incredulous chuckle, which Jimmy pretended not to hear.

Anyone who has an eye for the ridiculous has plenty to attract his attention in the wilds of Donegal. Our long and dreary drives home were often enlivened, I confess, at the expense of the natives and their agricultural methods. The vision of a long train of tattered figures slowly crawling on all fours up the side of a hill, thinning root crops with their hands, has somewhat of the ludicrous in it. I should like to transplant a Norfolk labourer there and hear his loud guffaw, for he would, I am sure, to use his own vernacular, "split his soides a-larfin'." Still, there is something to be said for their crocodile method, for undoubtedly the best plants are left. Then we come to a four acre field of clover just cut, and there espy a maiden, without a pitchfork or any implement of that kind, essaying to turn the crop and dry it by naively taking up handfulls and scattering it in the breeze. A very long and tedious process to the uninitiated, but then time is not of as much value here as with us. It was curious, too, to meet an array of the common or garden duck, with feathers inserted through their nostrils for the purpose of keeping them out of the corn—effective enough doubtless, but with an element of cruelty about it. Wallace, however, assured us that the insertion of the feather was a painless process—"to be sure, it made them a wee bit frusky at first, but that was all;" and therefore we had nothing more to say on the subject. "A wee bit frusky;" oh, how expressively these transplanted Highlanders do put it!

CHAPTER V.

PORT SALON AND LOUGH KINDRUM.

A warm balmy morning greeted us as we arose from our slumbers on July 14th, and, as we had heard great things were to be done on Lough Keel in the evening, we determined to start at noon. This would give us a chance of being present at an Irish wedding which was to take place this day, and which we were particularly anxious to witness. However, it did not differ very much from the ordinary village festival in England, save that instead of the usual showers of rice, the happy pair were saluted with a salvo of artillery. All work, of course, had been suspended for the occasion—it is indeed noticeable what trifles cause this suspension, the smallest pretexts being eagerly seized upon. When we Saxons walked abroad, many a precious half-hour was wasted, and the hay crops in the neighbourhood suffered accordingly, for the hill-men would give over their agricultural pursuits, and leave off making the hay, and stand in groups to gaze at us until we were lost to sight, as if we were inhabitants of another world, and had just landed from the planet Mars. To-day all the male inhabitants had armed themselves with guns of different patterns, from the ancient blunderbuss to a pin-fire breechloader of complicated action. As the bride and bridegroom emerged from the church porch, the rattle of artillery commenced, and continued at short intervals, the greater part of the morning. The bride was a nice looking girl ; but we were rather shocked to learn that neither of the happy pair could read or write, although they were quite young ; and consequently “ Bill Stumps, his mark,” was affixed to the parish register. It doesn't say much for the activity of the Irish Education Board in the district.

We arrived at Lough Keel at 1.30 p.m., and immediately got into two nice fish, the first in the identical spot where, on my former visit, I got hold of the lively one and lost him, just over a bar of sunken rocks. Jimmy declared it was the same fish, and christened him the "harbour-master," for I played him on some three or four occasions, but never got him in the net. The second was a 2 lb. fish of a silvery hue instead of golden. I notice that the silvery fish are not half such good fighters as the yellow ones; their flesh, too, is white, while the latter is as pink as salmon. Are they distinct species, or is the difference attributable to condition or feeding?

As luck would have it, about 3.30 p.m. the sun became obscured with dark clouds, the wind veered clean round to the north, and the atmosphere became bitterly cold—a bad look-out indeed for the evening fishing, for here, as in most places, a warm evening is a *sine quâ non* for successful sport in the twilight. Directly the wind changed the fish came very short, and as to a minnow, well, they would not look either at the real or artificial. Even the weather-beaten Jimmy did not at all relish the icy cold blast that came in gusts from the north, and although he is a particularly abstemious man, on this occasion he played havoc with F. R. B.'s flask—and what particularly attracted my attention was the fact that Jimmy gulped down the whisky neat in the first instance, following it up with a dose of water.

Now, I can understand a man preferring his whisky either neat or diluted, but the object of mixing the two internally was not clear and apparent, unless it was a tender regard for the lining of the stomach.

It certainly is not all beer and skittles for three men cramped up in a little craft, with a piercing wind playing upon them, and to me there is never one-half the pleasure in fishing from a boat which there is in wading or strolling

along the banks of some murmuring stream. There is nothing to beat the latter for real enjoyment. F. R. B.'s face and hands assumed a deep purple colour, and as he says singing is a capital thing to aid circulation when facing a wintry wind in a cockle-shell boat, pooh-poohing the idea that fish can hear, we are treated to a few selections from



PORT SALON.

the operas, interspersed with ditties such as the following, wholly of his own composition :—

“ With the wonderful tale of Jonah
'Tis little that can vie—
The only thing to touch it is
Three fat men in a fly ! ”

We managed to secure ten fish, the largest 2 lb., but we set off for home very much earlier than we had intended, and were only too glad to slide into our armchairs and rejoice in the warmth of our cheery peat fire.

Lough Kindrum we made up our minds to essay next, the only question being how to get there.

It was a good fifteen miles from us, and the road a real bad one, much too bad for poor old Betsy. So we settled to take the steamer which plies between Ramelton and Port Salon every Tuesday and Friday, provided the weather is favourable, and during the summer months is much affected by excursionists and others to view the seven arches, the show place of the district. A lovely trip it was—don't miss it for all the world if you find yourself in these parts. We joined the steamer at Fahan, and found it crowded with natives and others from Londonderry, going for a day's outing.

The scenery up the Swilly is grand and enchanting, and yet at times the desolation chills one. There are so few signs of animal or vegetable life among the bare hills and bleak rocks. Even the little forts, which are dotted about here and there, are now dismantled and deserted.

Four or five young men had come up from Derry with their golf implements, for there are some fair links at Port Salon, but rather a long journey to take for a couple of hours' play. To these, of course, the scenery was a very secondary consideration, a game of nap having greater charms. They formed an amusing study for others besides ourselves; indeed, at all times there is to me a fascination in watching card-players. Up at Cambridge nothing gave me greater pleasure than to scan the faces of winners and losers. I remember one fellow who used to whine in the most dolorous fashion when luck went against him. His face would assume the most cadaverous and melancholy expression ever seen on human countenance, while at every fresh stroke of misfortune he would burst into a sort of lamentation, just like that which poor Spottie of sacred memory used to emit when he was disturbed in his doggy mind. Directly his luck changed, then the most extraordinary metamorphosis would take place, the whine being

exchanged for some gleeful whistle or the humming of some favourite ballad, and his demeanour would become sprightly and cheerful, and he would even venture upon a joke or two. There was another fellow who lapsed into a dogged, hopeless, silent despair, and who would reiterate again and again, "Just my luck," "just my awful luck," and then would look round in an appealing manner for compassion and



PORT SALON.—PECULIAR ROCKS AT THE SEVEN ARCHES.

sympathy, though I don't think he found much of the required article in his stony-hearted companions—so at last, by way of consolation, he would reflect on the old adage, "Unlucky at cards, lucky in love," and cheer up a trifle. Another youth of my acquaintance, when fortune refused to favour him with her smiles, would mutter things unutterable under his breath, and smoke very fiercely and desper-

ately, and light a fresh pipe about every four minutes, and take frequent swigs of whisky and water, the consequence being that, if fortune persistently refused to bestow her favours, he would imbibe rather more liquor than was good for him, when he became rash and unreasonable. The tale goes that this gentleman, coming home from one of these parties a bad loser and in rather an elevated or stupefied condition on the eve of St. Valentine, went to his rooms and directed an ordinary label with his sweetheart's address upon it. He then went round to the porter's lodge, tied the label securely round his neck, placed a penny postage stamp upon his forehead, and made frantic efforts to get into the letter-box. Why this particular mania seized him no one has been able accurately to determine ; but possibly that miserable delusion of "unlucky at cards, lucky in love," played an important part. The porter eventually persuaded the would-be valentine to return to his rooms and think the matter well over before he thus threw himself away. Unfortunately, at this period the parcel-post had not come into existence, otherwise her Majesty's post-office might have accepted him over the counter, provided he had given an undertaking to find himself in food and drink.

Port Salon is situated at the entrance of the Swilly. It consists of an hotel, and nothing more, built by the enterprise and at the expense of Colonel Barton, and is placed in a lovely bay decked with golden sands, amid scenery which is a dream. If this hotel were in England it would swarm with visitors ; but, alas ! being in an out-of-the-way corner of Donegal, I fear Colonel Barton's enterprise is not as well rewarded as it deserves to be. The hotel is excellently managed ; indeed, we only wished we could have spent a month instead of a couple of days in this sweet Arcadia.

Lough Kindrum is three miles distant. As we only spent a short day on its waters, and not under favourable circum-

stances, we are not able to speak much from experience. The fish run large, though not so large as at Lough Keel, and we were told there were plenty of them. In a short interview with the keepers, we learnt that capital baskets were often made, and that fish of 2 lb. and 3 lb. are fairly plentiful. It is a romantic spot, and even if your sport is poor you are well repaid by the lovely scenery and soft Atlantic breezes which fan your brow and invigorate one with fresh life and spirits.

We paid a visit to the seven arches, the lions of the neighbourhood, scooped out of the rocks by the action of the water. Wonderfully wrought by Nature's handiwork, they appeared more like a succession of cavernous vaults, and, doubtless, had served as safe retreats for the smugglers of yore.

The whole of the coast just here abounds in caves, echoing with the dull splash of restless waves and seabirds' cries. The storms are terribly severe, and the hotel is often cut off from all communication with Ramelton and Derry for weeks together. However, the wolf is kept from the door by provisions conveyed over a precipitous road from Rathmullan.

I could wish for no better holiday than to locate myself with a friend at Port Salon for a month, fish Lough Kindrum, play golf on the cliffs, bathe in those blue, transparent waters facing the hotel, sprawl at full length on those golden sands, or watch the seals through the open window disporting themselves in the bay below as I refreshed the inner man, and inhaled the life-giving Atlantic breeze.

May it be ours some day to enjoy to the full what we have written of in this sweet Arcadia.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SWILLY.

A sail on the Swilly in Jimmy's boat had long been talked of, but deferred until Jimmy had ascertained from his nets that the white trout were coming up, so that we might have optical proof of his assertions concerning their abundance in the lough.

So one brilliant morning, as the lovely estuary sparkled in the glorious sunshine, we picked our way amid heaps of reeking seaweed, and stowed ourselves away in his capacious fishing craft. Business was to be combined with pleasure, for Mrs. B. was short of provisions and household necessities. So we hoisted the sail, and steered first for Rathmullan, and there laded our boat with food supplies sufficient to last a fortnight, one would have thought, to judge by the succession of bare-legged urchins who tottered down to the beach with huge paper parcels, which Jimmy was at his wits' end to know where to pack away.

I sympathise with anyone who has to cater for fishermen. It is a gigantic task, to say the least, and Mrs. B. began to look quite worn out with the worry and anxiety attending it. She said the proverbial hunter was not in the running with us, and the soft impeachment, I think, applies to all fishermen alike. The old saying, "As hungry as a hunter," to denote the heartiest of appetites, or the maximum of greediness, is simply a myth and a delusion. It is one of those sayings now exploded and no longer applicable, "*Nous avons changé tout cela*," since Isaac Walton died. The run of a lusty salmon and bonny trout in the bracing air of mountain, moorland, and stream, is more conducive to a great appetite than that supplied by old brer fox on the midland meads. To make the best use of a knife and fork

commend me to the hungry fisherman! I've seen them "a-swellin' visibly" under the operation, to be candid and Pickwickian.

Several white trout were rising round us as we pushed off from Rathmullan, and set sail for Inch Island, where we landed for lunch, and to dig up sand-eels, which Jimmy told us abounded here, and which the white trout were particularly partial to. We could have obtained a hundred-weight in a very short space of time, for at every turn of the



LOUGH SWILLY, WITH RATHMULLAN IN THE DISTANCE.—SAILING UP IN JIMMY'S BOAT FOR PROVISIONS.

sand a dozen silvery wrigglers danced about in the sunlight, until a pat on the head with a stick stayed their capers for ever.

Lunch over, we trolled in all the likely places round the coast, but never a run did we get, although we saw several trout sporting. Unfortunately, this part of the Swilly is infested with weed, which is rather detrimental to trolling; but a fly as a bait led to no better result.

Inch Castle, once the stronghold of the Donegal kinglets, but now a crumbling ruin, occupies a commanding position at the southern end of the island, and here we landed for a ramble, since nothing would inveigle the white trout.

Hither, too, had come a noisy party, of the style of 'Arry and 'Arriet out for an 'oliday, disturbing the peaceful spot with their piercing shrieks and laughter. Among them was a girl so prodigiously fat that it was a matter of some wonder how her friends had the temerity to convey her here in the frail crafts lying on the shingle. She had not attempted to scale the cliff on which the castle rested, but wisely remained below, and waddled about puffing and panting in search of shells. Save for this trifling characteristic there is no excuse for my mentioning her here, but F. R. B. was so struck with her remarkable charms that he careered round her as a satellite of inferior magnitude, and appeared to be annoyed when we inquired what space of time his revolutions occupied.

In my native village there used to be an exceedingly plump girl, whom all the boys at the village school delighted to pinch and call "Fatty." No one ever dreamt that a great future was in store for this girl, and that for a mere peep at this village lass sober Englishmen would plank down their last copper with a cheerful smile. Yet so it turned out. One day there passed through this village a travelling showman, who no sooner had cast his mercenary gaze upon the buxom maiden than he repaired to her parents and offered board, lodging, and liberal pocket-money, with a rise the second year conditionally on an increase in her weight taking place, if she would travel with his show and exhibit her remarkable charms. The offer was accepted, and the girl awoke to find herself famous. By means of a liberal diet, and with little exercise beyond holding receptions, shaking hands and smiling sweetly on Johnnies and Marys

at May festivals and such gatherings, she soon increased in girth, much to the delight of that travelling showman, who day after day expanded his lungs shouting, "Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, walk up and see Madamemoiselle Duval, the fattest lady in the whole wide world, whose dinner consists of a roasted sheep and six pounds of plum pudding, washed down with a gallon of ale—breakfast and tea to correspond. Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, and see for yourselves this fair beauty, for whose possession the Shah of Persia has offered half his kingdom." The girl afterwards married one of the artists in this travelling show, a diminutive gentleman who acted the part of "Tom Thumb's rival," and they eventually set up for themselves in the show line. Doubtless by this time they have a son and heir. If my surmise should prove correct, I find myself led on to speculate as to whether this scion of illustrious parentage will, in the distant future, be exhibited to an awe-struck world as positively the fattest man on earth, or something more than a rival to the ever-illustrious Tom Thumb. It is a problem which time alone will solve.

We had a rough journey back, for the wind had got up, and when it does blow down the Swilly your experience is a lively one. Jimmy's boat, however, rode gallantly over the tempestuous waters, and we reached land without falling victims to the land-lubber's complaint. Our procession home, laden with provisions and fishing gear, vastly tickled the natives, who followed us up, curious to learn the latest pranks of those peculiar Saxons.

Jimmy undertook to pickle the sand-eels for the benefit of Lough Keel trout, and a day or two afterwards we introduced the former to the latter's notice.

F. R. B. expressed the result in correct and forcible language when he said, "these trout are nuts on sand-eels." Yes—that is our experience in a nutshell, for we obtained a

beautiful basket of fish, and most of them attracted by the silvery eel. We gave the remainder of the bait into the keeping of Annie McGiddikie, with strict injunctions to take care of it. Imagine our horror, on returning a few days after, to be told by the smiling custodian of the cherished morsels, that the cat had eaten "them pickled things." F. R. B. was inconsolable, and vowed vengeance on the whole feline race, and wanted to have the McGiddikie cat out there and then and lynch it. But the wiser counsels of Jimmy and myself prevailed.

Another day we sailed across the Swilly and up the tidal portion of the Lennan to Ramelton. Just at the mouth of the river the salmon were leaping about in numbers. A pretty sight it was—the flash of their silvery scales in mid air and the streaks of foam on the placid waters, marking their whereabouts long after they had disappeared from sight. We threw over them with our flies, and then F. R. B. slyly drew a bottle of pickled prawns out of his pocket and we rigged them up on some up-to-date prawn tackle. Somewhere I had imbibed the notion that a luscious prawn was a fatal snare and certain to be successful when everything else had failed, but only to be resorted to as a last expedient. Although we must have trolled our prawns across many a salmon's nose, we could not induce one to have anything to do with it. Clearly we understood not the art of fishing in brackish water. Yet it was curious that Jimmy, who haunted the estuary day after day in the pursuit of his profession, had never come across anyone fishing it with a rod and line, save on one solitary occasion off the landing stage at Rathmullan, when he had seen a white trout or two taken with a fly.

The time for our departure was now close at hand. There was only one lough in the neighbourhood we had not visited, and that was Lough Salt, in an inaccessible region

some miles beyond Lough Keel. We could gain little information with regard to it, and were in doubt as to whether a boat could be obtained. Jimmy knew little of it. Once or twice in his life he had passed by it when out grouse shooting, and had seen, he said, plenty of small trout rising. So, taking everything into consideration, especially the distance and badness of the road, we resolved not to risk Betsy's life in an attempt to reach it. Already our frequent journeys over precipitous mountain defiles had begun to tell their tale upon her, and she was beginning to hang out signals of distress. We were requested to get out and walk more often than usual, while Wallace resorted to more and more novel sounds of encouragement.

A poor old widow, a neighbour of ours, in a lonely cabin, had died suddenly, and was to be buried in a burying ground some ten miles away over the hills. We would have wished to have paid our respects by following the *cortège*; but, alas! Betsy had done her best for us, and could do no more. Possibly it turned out for the best, for we learnt that those who followed the remains were expected to dig the grave, as there was no resident sexton in this mountain cemetery, and of this operation we were as inexperienced as a baby in arms. Even F. R. B., who is a handy man at most things, would have been a long way off figuring as a respectable sexton.

With a heavy heart we wrung the hands of the hillmen, among whom we had spent such a happy month. In that time we had mastered their names, and much of their history, and had been singularly drawn towards them. A hard struggle for existence they must have among those barren hills! How they manage to exist at all on the sale of their poultry, and the produce of their little patches of potatoes, flax, and oats, I know not; but they do somehow, and smile and joke withal, and consider life well worth the living.

Faults they have, no doubt, but forgotten and effaced by their pre-eminent virtues of kindliness, thoughtfulness, and generosity. "Come again next year," they said; "we shall be right glad to see yer," while Pat Fisher exhibited his grief in tears, and produced amid his sobs the well-known fly-book, saying, "Take some raats' baacks and hare's ears: maybe they'll sarve yer weel in England."

As for Jimmy, our hearts are still with him; he was one of nature's noblemen, if there ever was one, and we thought he deserved to be many rungs higher on the social ladder than that of a poor fisherman of the Swilly; and we yet remember the tall, gaunt figure standing in the morning mist, kindliness glowing in his face, and his long, grey hair floating in the breeze, waving his adieus as we drove past to catch the steamer at Rathmullan, and sadly set our faces homewards, *via* Enniskillen, Dublin, and Holyhead.

The greetings of our friends were not such as we should have expected. "How did you enjoy yourselves?" "Did you have good sport?"

But strange to say, they exclaimed, "Well, did you have any poteen?"

And we answered, "We enjoyed ourselves immensely."

"Did you have any poteen?" they shouted.

"Ah! talking of poteen," we replied, "a good story was told us of a raid being made on a still, and the wily distillers hid the implements and produce in the vault of a neighbouring church, which the resident landlord heard of, chuckled over, and lay low. How the natives did worship that man, to be sure."

"But did you taste the poteen, we want to know?"

"Ah!" said F. R. B., blinking his eyes, "poteen cold tastes like varnish, but with hot water, lemon, and sugar, 'tis a thing to be desired."

Haunts of my Youth.

THE TEME.

MOST grayling fishermen have enjoyed, at some time or other, a few days' sport on the Teme, and probably the club water at Leintwardine has been the scene of their labours, for without doubt this stretch of water will compare favourably with any other stream, both in the quantity and quality of the fish. Angling writers have again and again recorded red-letter days in this favourite haunt ; indeed, no handbook on grayling streams would be complete without a reference to silvery Teme. I may be prejudiced, but in my estimation the Leintwardine Club water is the equal of any stretch on the much-vaunted Derbyshire streams.

I was born and bred on the banks of the Teme, for my father was vicar of two parishes in its vicinity. All my earliest recollections cluster round its sandstone waterway, the buttercup-spangled meads and wooded dells through which it wends its way, now splashing and dashing over pebbled fords and red-veined rocks, now slowly flowing in stately grandeur between steep banks over a deep and rocky bed.

“Haunt of my youth, O Teme beloved,
How smooth thy brow, how cool ;
In slanting rays the moonbeams pierce
And prove each lurking pool.
The green turf guards thine onward course,
The hills of Wales thy fount ;
Here will I muse ere yet the sun
His chariot remount.”

My angling reminiscences date from the tender age of nine, when a suitable rod and outfit were procured for me, and I was entrusted to our clerk and sexton for instruction in the gentle art. The eccentricities of the old parish clerks are world-renowned, and still afford food for jest and laughter.

Old Pugh, for such was our clerk's name, was no excep-



THE TEME AT LUDLOW.

tion. He regarded himself quite as part and parcel of our establishment, and the births of the parson's children were faithfully recorded in the Bible, which was his peculiar property, in the lowermost seat of the venerable three-decker. When the worries and cares of office were laid aside, he affected a short black clay, and many an hour have I spent by his hearth listening to his amusing tales

of the country side, and watching the rings of smoke which circled from the blackest shag. The serenity and equanimity of his mind were ever unruffled, due in some measure to his constant companion, the aforesaid pipe. Only once in an eventful career was he "put about," as he called it.

In my earliest days we had a barrel-organ, old and decrepid, and constantly getting out of gear. When in this state it could only be induced to play the "Old Hundredth." Morning and afternoon, for months, we were regaled with this with hopeless monotony. Our squire, who was a choleric and irritable old gentleman, gave Pugh strict injunctions to have the instrument repaired before the following Sunday.

Pugh promised that the matter should be seen to, but whether he neglected to do so, or whether the instrument was totally irreclaimable, alas! Sunday came, and the organ still in the same pitiable plight. Old Pugh turned the handle, and forthwith the well-known strains were wafted down the church, and then in a voice tremulous with emotion he read out the first line of the hymn, "All people that on earth do dwell." The blood rushed to the squire's face, he stamped angrily in his roomy pew, and springing to his feet shook his fist threateningly at poor Pugh, and hissed forth, "Hang all people that on earth do dwell!"

As old Pugh said to me confidentially years afterwards, "he was regularly skeered and put about at such a very large order." The incident, however, was the means of our having a harmonium, an improvement, certainly, on its predecessor, although Pugh never took to it kindly, for he despised "them new-fangled musics."

My first venture was on the Hucks Barn Farm water, about a mile and a half out of Ludlow, on the Herefordshire side, known to fame as the place where George Barnwell

murdered his uncle. Here, in a wooded dell, "where silent waters lave," the haunt of kingfisher, dabchick, and moorhen, I first wetted a line, baited with a wasp grub.

Possibly one's first experience moulds the tenour of our after lives. If unsuccess had attended my youthful efforts, I might not have been so keen to have followed up the sport. As it turned out, I was intoxicated with success. Ten minutes had barely elapsed before I became aware that my float had totally disappeared. I communicated the intelligence to old Pugh, who, to my astonishment, sprang wildly to his feet, stowed away his clay in his waistcoat pocket, and shouted, "Pull, pull!" I did so, grasping my rod with both hands, and whirled over my head into some nettles behind what seemed to me a monster fish. It turned out to be a trout over 1½ lb., fat, and well fed.

How it was that either my line or my rod was not broken I cannot say. Providence is wondrous kind to little boys. If there happens to be an exceptionally large trout in some brook it usually falls a prey to a little boy fishing with a stick, a piece of string, and a bent pin. If all one hears is true, the expert angler is not in it with the small boy and his proverbial tackle. He is my *bête noir*. Often when staying with some non-angling friends, I have been taken down to a brook where trout are reputed to be, and reproached for my unsuccess with "Oh, I've seen little boys hoist out fish as long as my arm with a bent pin and a string." At such times I feel tempted to exclaim, "Hang all little boys that on earth do dwell." However, from this day onward, my footsteps were often along the river's margin, and many a good basket of fish has been my proud possession.

From Knighton to Tenbury—a distance of, well, by road, from twenty-seven to thirty miles—I have at one time or other fished in all the best water. As I have commenced

with the Teme on the southern or Herefordshire side of Ludlow, I will go on to speak of the water between there and Tenbury. At Ludlow four weirs hold the water up, and occasionally under these some large trout are captured, especially in the deeper water at Ludford; but here and all down the Steventon and Hucks Barn water the river is not



A DEAD STRETCH OF WATER ON THE TEME.

much cared for, and suffers from a plethora of anglers, and, I fear, poachers also. My experience is that from Ludford to Ashford Bridge the water is far better for trout than grayling—in fact, in these reaches I have never had much sport with the latter. There is a great deal of dead water, the abode of chub and rough fish. At Ashford, below the

weir, matters are different. The weir here is semi-circular in shape, very high, and quite perpendicular, and how the salmon managed to surmount this obstacle was always a matter of wonder to me, seeing that there was no salmon ladder. That they did so was evident from the swarms of samlet in the reaches above. In my young days I flatly refused to believe that these samlet were the offspring of the salmon, and pointed to Ashford weir as an impediment which no salmon without wings could negotiate. My ideas have considerably enlarged since then.

One day I was fishing with two companions here, when, in some shallow water, we saw a ghastly monstrosity in the fish line, which paid no attention whatever to our movements, although we tried to scare it with a stone or two. What could it be? The youngest of my friends naively suggested a codfish in the last stage of consumption. We plunged into the water and circumvented the queer object with our landing nets, and it proved to be a salmon, unable for some reason or other to get down to the sea. A more horrible sight I have rarely seen. It was completely covered with a white fungus, its head was out of all proportion, water-lice swarmed all over its body, which was scarred with wounds from rocks and stones. The smell made us all heave—evidently the last stage of mortification was at hand. We honoured the poor, long-suffering wretch with burial beneath the sod of a fair orchard.

Many a good grayling have I caught just below the weir, and further down in the deeper water there used to be a chub swim which would have delighted the heart of a chub fisherman. In my boyhood I spied these fat monsters sailing lazily about in a particular spot, much overgrown with scrub and trees, and where the stream was just too deep to wade. For long I meditated how to get at them, and at last decided on a plan. Having obtained a good

supply of bluebottles, I swarmed an overhanging tree, drew up my rod after me, and dangled one of these tempting morsels before a passing chub's nose. My first attempts, however, were practically failures, for the largest chub invariably broke my tackle—the first two or three rushes of a big chub are by no means to be despised. Some stronger gut settled them, and I often crammed my basket with "loggerheads," some being over 3 lb., which were distributed to the villagers, after several ineffectual attempts on the part of my brothers and sisters to make a meal off this cotton-wool.

However large the chub, they would give up the combat after three or four rushes, and lie placid and still on the top of the water, allowing me to descend from my perch and tow them to land like logs of wood. They have even become unhooked in so doing, but with wonderful consideration, made no attempt at escape, allowing me in some instances to capture them in my hands. No wonder fly-fishermen despise them after trout and grayling, so game to the last. Once I had a terrific fight with a 2 lb. trout from an overhanging tree.

I marked him sailing majestically towards me, and offered him a nice fat bluebottle which he did not think twice about accepting. The battle waxed hot and furious. It was quite half an hour before I judged him sufficiently played out to venture out of the tree. But my friend was not to be caught that way, and while I was climbing down he took the opportunity of making off, and wound himself round and round a stub, luckily near the surface of the water. The tackle, being about the strongest obtainable, held him, and I got him safely in the landing net at last. I was as proud of that trout as of any I have ever caught.

The Ashford Court and Moor Park water hold capital grayling and trout, and then comes, a mile or two above,

little Hereford Bridge (not to be confused with the county town, twenty-five miles away), where I have never done much good, although there are some tempting-looking streams. Below the bridge, in the Eastern Court water, the river runs very deep for some distance over a rocky bed. Here I have taken some very nice fish, but beware of the wading, for you may slip off the ledge of rocks into ten or twelve feet of water if the greatest care is not



LUDLOW CASTLE, WITH THE RIVER TEME BELOW.

exercised. All the way from here, through Burford to Tenbury, is some very nice trout and grayling water, all strictly preserved. The Swan Hotel at Tenbury has the privilege, I believe, of giving visitors leave to fish, but I fancy their water runs below Tenbury, and of the fishing beyond I have not had much experience. Mineral springs in the neighbourhood have earned for the little town the

title of Tenbury Wells, though as a watering-place it is not in the first rank.

The picturesque town of Ludlow is the most convenient centre to fish the Teme and its tributaries. By train and road the best water is easily accessible, and, moreover, the fisherman, who is an antiquarian, will find much to occupy his attention and delight his soul in his off days from piscatorial pursuit. Ludlow and its environs may be said to be the happy hunting ground of all antiquarians. Border castles, castellated country houses, British and Roman camps and battlefields abound, and every inch of ground has at some time or other resounded with the battle cries of the ancient British and their Roman foe, Welsh and English, Yorkists and Lancastrians, Royalists and Roundheads, while silvery Teme, which winds round the ancient castle of Ludlow, now shorn of its glory, but still proudly rearing aloft its moss-grown towers and venerable walls, has many a time run red with the blood of the slain. In the music of the stream one seems to catch the strains of the old minstrel lays which, in the days gone by, so often floated on the bosom of its waters, telling of brave knights and lovely damsels, and of the fierce border fights between the wild Welshmen and their hereditary foe.

A romantic spot indeed—for from the days when Caractacus made his last desperate stand against the Romans on *Caer Caradoc* in the distance, until a Dutchman, in the person of William of Orange, came to reign over us, Ludlow was scarcely ever free from the tramp of armed men. The Welsh were troublesome neighbours, and gave the inhabitants of the border counties but little rest. That “Taffy” was ever a thief is, unfortunately, only too plainly writ large in the annals of the past. In 1472, Edward IV. created his eldest son Prince Edward, a mere infant, Prince of Wales, and sent him with his younger brother to the castle of

Ludlow, "for justice to be doen in the Marches of Wales, to the end that by the authoritie of hys presence the wild Welshemenne and euill disposed personnes should refrain from their accustomed murthers and outrages."

Some evil destiny, however, pursued royalty reared at Ludlow; the poor young princes, after their removal, were murdered in the Tower; Prince Arthur, eldest son of Henry VII., died young, and Ludlow was shunned henceforth as the cradle of future kings.

On the northern or Shropshire side of Ludlow, the Corve, a capital trouting stream, joins the Teme. Above this commences the Oakley Park water full of both trout and grayling. After this the Downton Castle water is reached, perhaps the prettiest portion of the river, with its background of the wooded slopes of the Whitcliffe woods, the Vennals, and Brindgewood. The castle is not a relic of the baronial age, but a modern production, built by Mr. Payne Knight in 1776, the elder brother of Mr. Thomas Andrew Knight, the celebrated pomologist and first president of the Royal Horticultural Society, who succeeded to the estates on the death of his brother. The angler will find that the pears and apples at Downton bear ample testimony to Mr. Knight's successful experiments, research and skill. Would that he had been a disciple of Izaak Walton, for doubtless he would have tried his hand on the improvement of the finny tribe that sported beneath his windows. However, you will find plenty of good fish if you can get the necessary permission to catch them.

Then comes the Leintwardine Club water, so called from the pretty village formerly a Roman settlement which nestles on its banks. I can add little to what has already been written by scores of anglers about this celebrated stretch of water. A real good day here is something to be

remembered, and for grayling it has but few equals. I remember the day when the river here seemed to be almost overstocked ; but the soil is good and rich, and is able to supply sufficient food for any amount of fish. Having traversed the club water, the neat little village of Brampton Brian is reached, celebrated in the neighbourhood for its annual horsefair. Hither comes every old screw from the country round, patched and doctored up with an eye to a purchaser. The river here begins to narrow down, and is called the Little Teme. From here to the source the trout fishing excels the grayling, although plenty of the latter can still be caught as far as Knighton. Brampton Brian Park, a wild mountain enclosure filled with fallow deer, comes down to the water's edge, and is well worth an hour's ramble if the fish should not be sporting. Many years ago, I remember we boys discovered a badger's earth, and many were the visits we used to pay it in the hope of getting a view of the old chap. Late one evening, we got on his track with a terrier or two, and, thankful for small mercies, considered we had had a grand run, but we never got alongside Mr. Badger. Shortly afterwards he was caught in a trap, which ended our sport.

The badger, poor wretch, will soon be extinct—more's the pity, for he is a harmless beast, with many good qualities. Somehow or other he has got a bad name—"smells like a badger," or "dirty as a badger"—such are the libels upon the poor animal. A cleaner creature is not met with every day, nor is there anything offensive to the most sensitive olfactory nerves if you don't interfere with him ; yet I grant that, if you hustle him along with terriers, Mr. Badger has the power, like his kinsman the stoat, of making himself particularly unpleasant to his pursuers.

"As grey as an ould badger," is a Herefordshire saying which has some particle of sense in it, for a cunning old

badger is grey all over, the brownish black of his lower extremities being tipped with this colour when he arrives at a ripe old age.

My thoughts revert to the good old Cambridge days, and the dog fancier's up Chesterton way, where we used to take our Tyke, and Spot, and Trap, to have a bout with the badger, and pay half-a-crown for the "diversion."

That badger was either a fool or a knave—he was either a very degraded specimen of the breed, or else a very astute customer. He did not require much drawing. If the terrier had sufficient pluck to go in and tackle him, Mr. Badger offered the very feeblest resistance. He came out looking very meek and mild, with an injured expression on his countenance, as if to say "all right, old chappie, don't be rough on me, and don't distress yourself, for I know a game worth two of fighting with you." And then Spottie would walk jauntily about with the stump of his tail haughtily erect, and would condescendingly accept our plaudits and caresses, and imagine that he had done a big thing. Ah! dear Spottie, methinks you would tell a different tale if you came face to face with old badger in his native wilds, where he has not learnt how to be drawn for half-a-crown without any fuss or nonsense.

Skirting Bucknell, the fisherman finds himself in a pretty vale dotted all over with the famous Hereford cattle, with towering woods and hills on either side. The Central Wales Railway runs along the river, crossing and recrossing it several times before Knighton is reached.

Knighton is one of the chief towns of Radnorshire, its rows of white-washed cottages in the midst of typical Welsh scenery, reminding one that the border has been crossed and that you have entered gallant little Wales.

THE LUGG.

"Tell me of a real good grayling stream where I can get a few days' fishing?" said a mutual acquaintance, button-holing me in Victoria Station the first week in September.

"Try the Lugg," I said.

"The what——!"

"The Lugg, my boy, and you may go a long way and fare very much worse than on that stream."

"Great Scott! Where's the Lugg?"

"In Herefordshire. This is your route. Go to Paddington, book for Leominster *via* Hereford. Change at Leominster, and take a ticket for Kingsland, on the Kington line. On your arrival at Kingsland, get a conveyance and drive to Mortimer's Cross, where there is an excellent inn on the banks of the river. I can get you put on some of the best water, so take my advice and go—and here, I say, a word more—don't forget to send me a few grayling to grace my breakfast table in return for the information," etc.

He went, flogged my favourite grayling stream, and returned in triumph.

"It's just grand," he said. "Never enjoyed a week's grayling fishing so much in my life; and as to the lovely village of Aymestry—well, I long just to settle down and drone away the rest of my time in that sweet auburn of rural life."

The Lugg! What memories the name recalls. Part of my schooldays was spent at Lucton, close on the river, and many a day's fishing and good baskets of trout and grayling have fallen to my lot. It is a typical border stream; its upper waters flowing swiftly down among wooded hills, while hop yards and buttercup-spangled meads grace its onward course through Kingsland and the Bodenham district until

its tributary wave is delivered to mother Wye. Ah! there are some bonny fish at Shobden, Aymestry, and all down the Croft Castle and Kingland water. The May fly comes on this river in swarms. Directly it is off the trout are black and sluggish, and quite out of season with their annual gorge. I give unhesitatingly the award of honour to the grayling. There are some grand fish between Shobden and Kingsland, and they afford excellent sport. A red tag is the fly they are partial to, and often have I had three or four of these flies pulled to pieces in a day from their zealous attentions.

Mortimer's Cross is the name of a hamlet and an inn, on the scene of the great battle of the same name. Opposite the inn there is some capital grayling water. About a mile and a half of the water on this side has been formed into a club. There is many a spot here I could point out where I have captured fish not far off a couple of pound weight.

A summer or two ago I was down in the old haunt at the commencement of the May fly season, would that it had been the grayling time instead; however, better sport with the trout I could not have wished for. There was more than fish to attract one's attention, especially me, whose boyhood was principally spent here. The Aymestry woods which come down to the river's margin are a natural paradise for birds. What a splendid collection of eggs we boys used to make! I commend this spot not only to the angler, but also to the entymologist. Herefordshire is celebrated for its birds, but this spot in particular.

Strolling along the banks of the Lugg on that lovely June morning, every stream, every over-hanging bank and bush and tree seemed to be historical. Here, I remembered a tremendous tussle with a 2 lb. trout, and how, being without a landing net, for boys don't affect landing

nets, I had been obliged to hoist him up on the bank, and had broken my rod in consequence. There I had played and lost a splendid grayling, the like of which I have never got hold of before or since. Under that overhanging bank was an ouzel's nest; down by that silent pool a kingfisher was ever wont to build his palace of fish bones.

The birds that frequent the water-side have always had



THE LUGG.—A PARADISE OF BIRDS AND FISH AMONG THE
AYMESTRY WOODS.

a fascination for me. Their eggs were always of greater value in my eyes than any others, possibly because they were the most difficult to find, and too often inaccessible to all save those prepared to wade about in the water and peer under overhanging banks and among the stones of dilapidated bridges or in old walls at the foot of weirs where the current rushes down impetuously.

An old tree overhanging the water below the bridge at

Mortimer's Cross arrested my attention. What incident in my schooldays did it remind me of? I rested my rod against it, lay down beneath its shade, and ruminated. Soon the whole scene returned to me. I had climbed this tree in search of a nest one Sunday morning, and as I was considering how best to get down, the bell commenced to ring for service and I realised I had just ten minutes in which to get back, or else . . . ! But somehow I could not negotiate that tree. I felt sure I must tumble into the water and be drowned, or miss my footing on the other side and be dashed to pieces on the ground. What an awful three minutes I spent! At last, in sheer desperation to either do or die, I made a last convulsive effort and alighted on *terra firma*, but unfortunately made a gaping rent in my best Sunday bags. Hot, out of breath, and somewhat like a criminal, I joined the others as they were being marshalled for church, and of course they added to my misery by inquiring if I had lodgings to let, and whether I was airing the rooms, and sang softly such ditties as—

“Giddy, giddy gout,
Your shirt's hanging out.”

I was in disgrace that day, and felt truly miserable, and resolved never, never again to go birds'-nesting on Sunday.

Somehow boys always choose Sunday to get into mischief. When they intend to do anything especially wicked, Sunday is always selected as an appropriate day. I first began to smoke on Sunday. I was gleefully told that my face looked very long and pallid, and bore a tallow candle hue. I know my feelings were too awful to describe. My stomach seemed to have got into a wrong place altogether. I had to retire with speed in the middle of the afternoon service. Ah! these days that are dead will never come back to me. It is this fact, possibly, which makes their memory so

especially delightful. "To the philosopher 'a day that is dead' has no value but for the lesson it affords; to the rest of mankind it is inestimably precious for the unaccountable reason that it can never come again." I don't quite know in which category to place myself—among the philosophers or the rest of mankind. Some parts of my body had a very uncomfortable and painful experience in the days of long



THE LUGG.—BODENHAM BRIDGE.

ago; so perhaps the flesh sets little value on these days but for the lesson they afford; and as regards the spiritual part of myself, if it does recall the past with joy, I fancy it must be through the illusion of distance. I am forcibly reminded of this when I see some wretched little boy on the platform, awaiting the train which is to convey him back to school, surrounded by his mother and sisters.

I know too well that little boy's feelings. He tries to assume a don't-care and nonchalant air, but it is a sorry failure. There is a tremulous movement of the lips, a watery look about the eye, a cleaving of a parched tongue to the roof of the mouth, which betray his real feelings. No ; don't prate to me about the good old days at school. To the generality of men they are only so awfully precious because they will never go to school again this side the grave.

But I am fond of recalling the hours spent in birds'-nesting beside the Lugg. There is no delusion here. They are among the most delightful of my life. I never fail to live them over again when down here. What a triumph it was to have found a kingfisher's nest, generally placed deep down in some hole on the river bank ! It wanted some finding. When we had an idea that a kingfisher had built somewhere in the vicinity, we adopted a novel expedient to find its nest. We applied our nose to every hole in the locality, and when we obtained an overpowering whiff of high fish, there was our kingfisher's nest to a certainty.

This to me is the one blot on the escutcheon of the king of English birds : it is regardless of all cleanliness, and his sanitary measures are of such a nature that it is a marvel he does not fall a victim to a virulent attack of typhoid. There was a legend amongst us boys that the British Museum would give £100 for a complete nest. How often have I appropriated that little sum all to myself, and settled to my own satisfaction how I would spend it ! What a jubilee the old lady at the shop would have had ! However, I never came across what the British Museum was in need of. The idea that the nest is a delicately woven structure of fishbones, and consequently a difficult thing to dig up whole and undisturbed, is a countryside myth. As a matter of fact, the poor kingfisher is absolutely innocent of any attempt to form a nest, but simply utilises

the bleached bones of its victims, which lie scattered about its accustomed haunt.

Although so very careless of its domestic duties, and unsanitary in his habits, the kingfisher cannot be called an idler. Like the typical business Englishman, he is always in a hurry—darting up and down the river with terrific speed,



THE LUGG.—AMONG THE SHOBDEN WOODS.

as if every moment were worth its weight in gold, his regal colours flashing like streaks of glory in the gleaming sunshine.

The water ouzel, on the other hand, seems always to have plenty of time at its disposal, taking long spells of rest on some projecting rock in mid-stream, and curtseying to you as demurely as a schoolgirl. "Fine morning, young

man," he seems to say. "I trust you are enjoying this bright sunshine as much as I am. Take my advice, and have a bath with me in this limpid stream. Here goes!" and forthwith he takes a series of headers, returning now and again to shake his feathers, and to drop more curtsies with almost painful politeness.

With his white choker and sombre habiliments, he reminds me of a certain young country curate who, wishing to ingratiate himself with his flock, made it a rule never to pass anyone without some salutation and a few words, generally in reference to the weather. Passing through the fields one morning he espied a son of toil ploughing with his team of horses.

"Good morning, young man!" said the youthful cleric; but no answer was returned.

"Good morning, young man!" again ventured the curate, in a slightly louder voice. Still no attention was paid to his greeting.

"Fine moorning, young maaan!" at last roared the curate, determined to have some answer.

Hodge stayed his steeds, and, slowly turning round, exclaimed with an indignant air, in a natural, rhythmical strain—"Foine morning, eh! and did I ever say it wunner? Do yer want to hargify about it? 'cause I dunner!" Utter collapse of curate, who was never again the same man in the art of politeness.

The water ouzel, or dipper as he is more often called, loves only those streams which flow down through wild, mountainous districts; little cares he for those rivers which lazily meander through midland meads, "which dream along toying with their forget-me-nots, too idle even to make love to their flowers vigorously," though the streams be bright and clear, and the trout in them lusty and fat. I seem to understand the ouzel in his love for those mountain streams which

splash and dash over boulders and stones, seeming to enjoy their life so well as they sparkle and laugh in the sunshine. These sequestered spots would be my haunt had fate decreed that I should be a bird ; where the waters leap and play in unbounded freedom, or swirl and eddy under some grim precipice to gather strength and vigour for the rapids further on, I could eke out a tolerably contented existence. An eye for the beautiful in Nature has my young friend the dipper, for he and his mate ever construct their nest in the most picturesque spot they can find—beside some weir or waterfall, where they can watch the foaming water, and listen to its eternal music from behind a screen of ferns growing out of some crannied wall.

And the yellow water wagtails, too, are here, so graceful and sylph-like in their motions ; now hovering in mid-air as they espy some treasured morsel in insect form ; now running with wonderful speed along the water's edge ; now standing in mid-stream on some projecting stone, displaying their rich colour, and expanding their wagging tails. The male is essentially the peacock of the brook. In one of the crannies of yonder bridge, a mother used to sit, year after year, in stately pomp in her snug little nest, such a contrast to the kingfisher's fever-breeding den, and the rough and tumble edifice of the ouzel. She was not often disturbed in her maternal duties under the arch of that old bridge, where the water runs deep and fast, for boys feared the impetuous current and its hollow moaning as it swept under. There she used to sit, safe from all intrusion, happy in the tender solicitude of her faithful mate, and in the anticipation of a young family growing up around her to cheer the solitude of her streamlet home.

Follow the current down until the stream for awhile ceases its impetuous progress, and gently laves the moss-grown banks of a quiet woodland glen. This spot is loved

of dabchick, coot, and moorhen. Most boys have robbed the moorhen's clumsy nest, built on some decayed stubs at the water's edge or out in the stream on some overhanging bough, with scarce an attempt at concealment, but almost inviting the passer-by to help himself.

The dabchick, or lesser grebe, has little of the moorhen's confiding nature, for, on the contrary, there is a display of much cunning. A rude nest of mud and weeds built on the very surface of the water, held and supported by weeds or boughs, without any effort at decorative taste, to the untutored eye looks nothing more than a floating mass of corruption. No conscious effort at concealment could devise a better method than is pursued by the dabchick. When occasion requires that the nest with its dirty white eggs should be left, it is carefully covered up with mud, and a few weeds are often added to further deceive human eyes. The result certainly justifies the means. I can still remember my astonishment when a friend of mine, scraping off a lot of black mud from what appeared to me some floating corruption, revealed the unhatched progeny of a dabchick, then as warm as when the mother had left them, perhaps some hours back.

Almost immediately the young birds have broken through the shell they bubble over into the water, commencing all too early the struggle for existence. Why the mother trusts her offspring thus early to the tender mercies of a cruel world I am at a loss to conceive, for they fall the very easiest prey to rats and pike; and even trout will pull them down, either to feast on them or merely for mere amusement. Instinct is clearly at fault here, since the dabchick has not learnt to be more fully equipped before the perils of the deep are faced—the marvel being that any ever survive their infantine precocity.

And here, in these quiet waters, the mad, bald coot keeps

watch and guard, and sounds the warning note of danger—no “witless ass,” dear Mr. Drayton, but sharp and wary beyond conception, from having held from generation to generation the post of sentinel on the silent waters.

Here, too, the water-rail has its headquarters, which from time immemorial has studied the problem how “to make itself as scarce as possible”; the best methods of “getting out of the light, and lying low.” It has now nearly reached



THE LUGG.—AYMESTRY WEIR.

perfection in the art of concealment. Would that we all had some definite purpose in view—even how to be retiring and modest would be a worthy object for attainment in many.

Beyond the woodland glen where the stream flows wreathed in smiles amid stones, pebbles and sand, the little sand-piper flits about uttering his shrill piping notes. In the sparse tufts of grass by the water's edge, like little oases in the desert, he and his mate construct a neat and compact

nest, but so tiny as to seem quite out of proportion to the bird, and especially her eggs. Dear little sandjack ! I envy thee not thy sandy wastes, which the soft, cool shadows never reach, where no trees invite one to shelter from the midday heat, naught but the rippling water tempting one to linger near thy arid home. Yet I sympathise with thee in thy preference for these desert wastes rather than the hedgerows and gardens, where children are ever on the alert, full of mischief and boisterous laughter ; where the dust of the country roads is ever being swept in whirlwinds to await some kindly shower to restore it to mother earth again.

I fondly thought I was alone in my meditations and that no prying eyes were fixed upon me, but I was mistaken. Half-a-dozen little warblers were peering out of some reeds with their gimlet eyes, gazing disdainfully down upon me. I know what they are saying—" Oh, you great, lazy brute, get up, will you ? and leave us to ourselves."

So I sauntered off to pick up a trout or two in favourite runs which I had whipped so often in the days gone by, and then for a ramble across country to see the old school once more, and to gaze on the cold stone steps where so many of the past and present generations had sought to cool the burning anguish of the cane. Mr. Jones, in his holiday papers, relates how an uncle of his, under Dr. Valpy, at Reading, used to say that half-a-dozen boys were to be seen any morning outside the Doctor's study, sitting on a large stone which had the credit of being exceptionally cold, in order to go into the presence numb. I confess to being ignorant of this dodge, since it was always after the operation we used to bring ourselves into contact with the delicious coolness of the stone steps—but since reading Mr. Jones's book it has occurred to me that if the part were brought into contact before and after, it would, indeed, be a blessed mitigation of pain.

Round about Rhayader.

I.

It was the Mayor and Corporation of Birmingham who were the means of directing my footsteps to Rhayader, in Radnorshire, for a three weeks' holiday, although if questioned on the subject these civic dignitaries might deny the soft impeachment and totally disclaim any knowledge of the writer.

It came about in this way. On an overpoweringly warm evening in June I and F. R. B. were smoking the fragrant weed, and trying to feel cool and comfortable by babbling of the rippling streams we had fished, and making plans for future exploits on those we had not.

"Have you ever been to Rhayader, in Wales?" said F. R. B. as he meditatively drew a whiff from a choice Havannah, and sent forth a dozen rings in quick succession towards the ceiling, "My geography doesn't run to the county."

"Yes," I replied, "I know it well. It's in Radnorshire, on the Wye, among some of the prettiest scenery in the Principality. I went over there once when fishing the Ithon, and made a note of it as a fishing resort, for the Wye, Elan and Clearwen are likely looking trout streams, and below Rhayader they unite, and the aspect of the Wye is changed from a mountain torrent into a respectable salmon river."

"Well, my boy," ejaculated F. R. B., with a knowing nod of the head, "if that's your intention you had better look sharp and carry it out, for the Birmingham Corporation are about to utilise the Elan and the Clearwen for their water supply, and are commencing to make two or three huge



RHAYADER.—CWM ELAN BRIDGE AND FALLS.

lakes, and there is a rumour afloat that the waters of the Wye are also to be stored up to supply our little village."

"A monstrous sacrilege, and ought not to be allowed!" I exclaimed. "There ought to be an antivandalism society to protect these fairy vales."

"Yes, but as there isn't, let us spend a week or two of our holiday down there."

"Happy thought ! so we will, and you shall photograph every spot about to be submerged ; and in years to come we will take our grandchildren down there, and row them about on the lakes, and produce photos of the country before the flood. They will look upon us as Shem and Japhet, and will cross-question us as to the whereabouts of Ham."

"It was Brummagen did it," said F. R. B., as, one Monday morning, we settled ourselves comfortably in the morning train for Shrewsbury. Smaller things than water-works change the current of our lives, and make them flow in very different channels to what we had mapped out for them. However, Rhayader had no effect on mine as far as I know, nor directly on any of the rest of our party (for F. R. B. always takes his family, to keep house and supply his wants. He says, not without truth, that half the pleasure of a holiday is being well looked after). But, alas ! it did cut short one little life that crept into our compartment, and curled itself up in sleep, quite oblivious of the fate it was hastening along to meet at the rate of fifty miles an hour. As Cowper says :

"The man recovered of his bite ;
It was the dog that died."

After we had shaken ourselves down in a pretty house on the outskirts of the village, we made inquiries after a local fisherman to guide our footsteps, experience having taught us that "an old hand" for advice and guidance is half the battle.

"Indeed, they are all fishermen in Rhayader," was a pretty general answer. "There's many here as gets their living by catching trooties," said another. "Eh, sure ; but

they net the trout and spear the salmon, and it's a poor hand you gents from Lonnon will make of it," said another.

At last, when they had almost crushed all hope of sport out of us, we meekly supplicated them to inform us who out of this galaxy of fishermen was most likely to be of use to us.

"Ah! Evans Evans is the best indeed. He will just fill his basket with troots while the others are putting their rods together."

After such a recommendation we went off and interviewed Evans Evans, who was a shoemaker by trade, a nice, civil young fellow, who gave us a far more cheerful description of the fishing, and by way of encouragement told us he had brought home 14 lb. of trout the week before out of the Wye. F. R. B. caught on at this. He was eager to emulate the prowess of Evans Evans, so we arranged to fish the Upper Wye, commencing at the fifth milestone on the Aberystwith road.

Most people have seen or read of the Wye and its charming scenery between Hereford, Ross, and Tintern, but few are acquainted with it as it flows down from its source a wonderfully clear mountain streamlet, wending its way amid bare bleak hills, now rushing round massive boulders and rocks which it has dislodged in its wrath and still seems to quarrel with; now amid tangled brakes over a rocky bed until it rests awhile in some deep shady pool beloved of salmon, to gather strength for the rapids down below. One of the most picturesque spots we passed on the Aberystwith road was where a little stream, called the Martog, runs down from the hills and joins the Wye in a deep valley.

When we commenced operations the water was as clear as crystal and very low, with a hot sun shining full upon it. I thought, under these circumstances, it was not a bad

performance to pick up seven or eight fish ; but Evans Evans knocked the conceit out of me altogether. He averaged three to my one, and F. R. B. was just as much out of the running. A shortish line and a dry fly (an alder) seemed to be his *modus operandi*. Imitation is the sincerest



THE WYE ABOVE RHAYADER.—CONFLUENCE OF THE MARTOG AND
THE WYE.

form of flattery ; and since we had nothing but admiration for Evans Evans's skill, we adopted similar tactics. But Evans Evans walked round us anyhow, while F. R. B. glared darkly, blistered his hands, and muttered to himself something about "tailors" and "duffers," presumably

alluding to his own inability to emulate Evans Evans with the dry fly, and concluded by slipping upon a rock and sitting down in three feet of water. It was an edifying spectacle to see him very meekly emptying the water out of his waders, and pondering over the moral lessons which piscatorial pursuits bring so forcibly home.

In the true angling writer's style, I was about to add that our first experience on the infant Wye was not an unhappy one—but stay ! I will be honest, and say candidly that it was not all beer and skittles and unchequered bliss. Wasps to the right of us, wasps to the left of us, and horseflies all round us, stung and worried us to desperation. I don't think either of us could have got up a laugh even to save our lives ; and as to humour—well, Sidney Smith or Swift would have failed to make us appreciate their best joke or repartee. As F. R. B. very logically pointed out, one is practically helpless to resist the attacks of these venomous insects with a fishing-rod in one hand and a landing-net in the other. The latter must be sacrificed if you want to give yourself a chance. A horsefly has two points of attack—the back of your hand and your neck. The cowardly villain ! It doesn't matter which hand he attacks when one holds the fishing-rod and the other the landing-net, he knows he's quite safe. Well, sacrifice your landing-net, and see if he doesn't come and nip your unoccupied hand, because he knows you can't hit him on the head with the other. A wasp flies round and round your head with angry imprecations, and, having frightened the life out of you, flies away chuckling, or else alights on your neck and drops down your back. Oh ! my dear young reader, may you live long and grow old without such an awful fatality overtaking you. Should it happen, I promise you one thing—it will live long in your memory—as long as you have a conscious existence in this world and the next you

will remember the celerity with which you whipped off your clothes to relieve yourself of that thorn in the flesh. Neither F. R. B. or myself are given to the using of unparliamentary expressions ; but, on this occasion, driven to desperation, we found it consoling and refreshing, and a relief to our



**RHAYADER.—THE UPPER WYE INFESTED WITH HORSEFLIES
AND WASPS.**

nervous system, to let our tormentors know what we thought of them.

Worn out with their constant attacks, I sat down on the bank and smoked, placidly watching F. R. B. and Evans Evans. It was an amusing sight. Their arms were being

waved frantically about in mid air, their casting was jerky and spasmodic. When they threw over a rising fish a horsefly would viciously remind them of his presence and make them jump and strike and yowl all at the same time. At times I could only catch an indistinct glimpse of F. R. B.'s burly form through a halo of tobacco smoke and a swarm of insects which relentlessly followed him. His patience was at last rewarded. I saw him strike and hook a good trout; with the greatest care he played it into the shallow water by the bank, stepped out on *terra firma* to pick up his landing-net, which in a moment of agony he had flung there, and was just in the act of getting the net under when he dropped the whole bag of tricks and ran away like a lamplighter.

I quite remember that the thought which flashed across my mind was the whereabouts of the best private lunatic asylum. Why the thought came to me I cannot tell, unless it was due to an amusing incident which once happened when playing cricket against an eleven of a private asylum—and a very good eleven, too, they could put in the field. Two of our men were batting, one of whom made a rare good hit to long leg. The ball was well fielded, but to our astonishment the fieldsman instead of returning the ball calmly put it into his breeches' pocket and decamped in an opposite direction at a hundred yards' pace. The keepers who were always on the look-out for the appearance of these moments of mental aberration on the part of their wards, at once gave chase, which after an exciting hue and cry, resulted in the capture of the erratic fieldsman.

In the meanwhile, the batsmen had been making hay while the sun shone, and I hesitate to say how many runs they scored. I know that a very moot point had to be decided. Was it lost ball? and yet how could it be lost

ball when, all the time the ball was in the fieldsman's breeches' pocket? However, we generously conceded the point and scored only a boundary hit.

F. R. B.'s stampede was owing to his inadvertently stepping on a wasps' nest. In a graphic account afterwards, he said they swarmed round him in such clouds as to obscure the light of the sun, causing him for the moment to suppose that an eclipse had taken place, but the illusion was but transitory and very unpleasantly dispelled.

As we drove home Evans Evans pointed out to us the proposed site of the lakes where the waters of the Wye were to be stored up to supply London. I doubted very much whether the contemplated plan would ever take effect, although the Birmingham plan was an accomplished fact, for it seemed improbable that the enormous demand would be equal to the supply of this little mountain stream, which, in hot, dry weather, runs very low. The quality of the water is excellent, far better, I should say, than what the Elan and the Clearwen will supply Birmingham with. But judging from the result of the report of the Royal Commission, London will seek for water nearer home.

"Out of the water into the frying-pan," and to accomplish this as speedily as possible Mrs. B. is ever on the *qui vive* to relieve us of our spoil. Bitter was our disappointment to find that the trout were not worth eating, woolly and tasteless to a degree. We afterwards found the reason to be the long, dry summer, and insufficiency of food. An old keeper assured us that there was not a firm fish in the river, a fact we had no reason to doubt long before our holiday terminated. The driest sherry was ineffectual in making them at all palatable.

II.

Punctually at 9.30 a.m. the pony trap was at the door in readiness to convey us as far as Caban, to fish the Elan. Gipsy, the pony, is not exactly a stepper, but she gets along at a comfortable pace, especially when I am driving. F. R. B. thinks she goes best when he handles the ribbons, a delusion entirely of his own fertile imagination. When he is driving I always remark to him, "Gipsy seems tired to-day," or, "we are getting over the ground at a very slow pace—can't you get her to go a bit faster—here, let me have the reins," etc., etc.; but such remarks seem only to confirm him, in his opinion, that he never saw Gipsy go at such a terrific pace in his life. So I generally await the arrival of the trap, jump in as it draws up at the door, and appropriate the reins. F. R. B. is not to be found, luckily, at this critical moment. He is generally engaged in a game of hide and seek after some article he has mislaid, and after he and Mrs. B. and the maids have searched the house high and low for twenty minutes, he suddenly discovers that he has been carrying it about in his pocket. He treats this aberration of mind quite calmly and coolly—neither surprise nor sorrow is depicted on his countenance. He simply gives the article a glance of scorn and indignation, presumably for having the cheek to be in his pocket, gets into the trap and says, "All right, drive on."

The road from Rhayader to Nantgwilt runs beside the Elan. Caban, about four miles up stream was the point we made for—a wild, bleak, mountain gorge, where the stream rushes precipitately down over boulders and stones. In a narrow defile the dam for the largest of the contemplated lakes had been marked out, and the track for the railway to be brought up here from Rhayader was traced out with posts.

The inhabitants of the few scattered cabins wore a dejected and melancholy air owing to the near approach of the flood which was to hide the homes of their childhood from mortal ken.

A decrepit old native undertook to house Gipsy in a particularly high smelling outhouse, which I don't think had



RHAYADER.—THE ELAN AT CABAN.

been cleaned out for the last century. I was sorry for Gipsy, but a better lodging could not be procured. Feeling amiably disposed, we began to condole with the poor old native at the approaching termination of his tenancy. We broached the subject sympathisingly, and spoke of it in a subdued

and feeling voice. I went so far as to wipe away a tear, but it was only caused by a fly, bent on suicide, getting into my eye, yet it had such an effect on the old man that he burst into a paroxysm of grief, and would not be comforted. Before it had finished, F. R. B. took me by the arm and led me off down to the river, censuring me for wiping away a tear.

I said, "My dear boy, it was a fly."

"A fly or not," he returned, "your expression was enough to make a sphinx shed tears."

This is not the first time I have got into a trouble over a fly. I ran over a dog once, when driving, because a fly dropped into my eye, and stung like a wasp. I had to pay the Vet.'s bill. Another time I ran into an Italian vendor of marble statuettes from the same cause, and had a long account to settle. I fancy there must be something particularly attractive about my eyes, for if there is a fly in the neighbourhood, it always makes for one or the other. I should not like to say how many suicides have taken place in them, but it can't be far short of a million. I have mentioned the matter to several oculists, but they have offered no intelligent solution of the mystery. Consequently I have got into the unhappy knack of exclaiming, "Oh, my eye!" if anything astonishes me, which my friends consider vulgar. They say, "Great Scott," or "By Jupiter," is more fashionable and up to date.

The Elan and the Clearwen unite just above Caban, at Nantgwilt. The trout fishing up to Caban has hitherto been free, the upper water only being reserved. Of course the salmon fishing is entirely in private hands, and some very good fish are taken in the water. About a mile out of Rhayader there is a noted spawning bed, and at the right season scores of salmon may be seen passing over it. If it were not for the depredations of the Rebeccaites, salmon would be far more numerous than they are.

The unchecked depredations of these Rebeccaites are a disgrace to our civilisation. They are a gang of desperate poachers, whose leader dons the garb of a respectable old lady of the Mother Hubbard type, and his followers assume a more juvenile feminine garb and pose as her daughters. Doubtless the feminine garb was assumed as a means of putting the watchers and bailiffs off the scent—at any rate, I understand that under the shelter of petticoats they enjoy a tolerable amount of success. That they should disguise their manhood when mercilessly traversing all the laws of common humanity shows that possibly there may be a flickering spark of shame in Taffy's bosom; but that they should cover their nefarious practices with petticoats is rough luck on the gentle sex.

The pseudo old lady and her evil brood prowl about at night with torches and lanterns, and mercilessly spear the poor salmon on their spawning beds. They are aided and abetted by their psalm-singing brethren, who purchase the unwholesome food. If there was no demand there would be no supply, and this brutal slaughter would soon cease. But there is a ready sale for the fish, among the lower class, at 2d. per pound, to their shame. One could understand the people claiming the river to be open and free for all to fish; but to spear the salmon when propagating their species is a monstrous iniquity, and ought to be put down at all cost. However, the authorities appear to be helpless, and one determined man is still needed to bring down the strong arm of the law with the utmost severity upon this brutal gang.

The free fishing at Caban is not good, although occasionally some nice fish are taken by the local men who know the water. It was on the preserved portion above that we looked for sport, and for this we were awaiting the necessary permission.

However, the free water yielded us enough for dinner, and we unearthed Gipsy from her unsavoury den and drove home, not quite settled in our minds whether to be angry with Birmingham for transforming this lovely valley, or to be pleased at the prospect of a grand lake and bonny trout. Another Vrynwy would soon be here and an hotel full of ardent anglers. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

F. R. B. has been gifted with a faculty for picking out the chief features of a place at a mere glance. Driving back through Rhayader, I heard him mumbling something about "pubs" and "chapels." I ventured to inquire his thoughts. He said: "Why, look! every other shanty is a pub or a chapel." He was not far out, for Rhayader, with only 800 inhabitants, can boast of eighteen public-houses and beershops and two grocers holding licences, along with five chapels. According to a modern historian, Queen Elizabeth was nuts on pubs, and therefore I opine that she would have been *rayder* gone on this place; and Oliver Cromwell, who had a sneaking fancy for whitewash and chapels, might have lived and died here a happy and contented man. However, both Bess and Oliver seemed to have overlooked this plum in their Welsh domain, for I can find no authentic record of any visit, which is strange. In England there are few pubs of any antiquity or respectability where good Queen Bess did not drop in at, or churches or chapels which Oliver did not exercise his artistic taste upon with a coat of whitewash.

On the following day we were the holders of a permit to fish the preserved portions of the Clearwen and the Elan. But it was an impossible day for fishing, for there was a blazing sun, and the water low and fine. We decided on a picnic and the exploration of the Clearwen, above Nantgwilt. So we started with the whole household in our charge. At Nantgwilt Manor-house the road abruptly ends,

and there is nothing but a rough cart track, full of ruts and holes along by the riverside. The little Clearwen flows down a fairy vale, clothed at the water's edge with lovely foliage, while up above tower lofty hills, clothed with stag's-horn moss and the whinberry plant. At the lower end of the vale stands Nantgwilt House, an old-fashioned stone structure, in a beautiful situation. It makes one's heart ache to think that the old place will soon be razed to the ground, together with the tiny barn-like church, a hundred and fifty yards away, all moss-grown with age.

There was no riding over the rough cart track which led up to Dol Mynach, the jolting was terrible and threatened destruction to the springs. So we alighted and led Gipsy carefully along. A tumbril with a couple of horses coming in an opposite direction sent up a wail of terror from Mrs. B. and the maids. How should we pass? Below ran the river, above was a steep wooded declivity. Even F. R. B., usually so stolid, blinked his eyes and looked puzzled. The man in charge of the tumbril shouted wildly and pointed back.

"The monster is ordering us back," excitedly exclaimed Mrs. B.

"Oh, lorks! mum, let's go back," cried the maids, "or else we shall all be tilted over into the river," and they picked up their dresses preparatory to flight.

He was only pointing us to a slight excavation in the bank into which we backed Gipsy, and the tumbril just squeezed past. Mrs. B. and party perched themselves on the bank and watched the process with clasped hands and bated breath. I have asked F. R. B. several times why the dickens he did not photograph this scene. It would have been worth having. He says Mrs. B. would not have liked it. I suppose family men understand this. Further on we had to leave the cart track and take to an even fainter track,

which led up to the old farmhouse of Dol Mynach, where Gipsy was placed in a loose box and well looked after.

Nothing can be wilder than the scenery as the Clearwen is followed up to its source, now and again tumbling among rugged rocks, over a steep cascade, into some deep silent pool, where lurks many a fine trout ; a whitewashed home-stead, at rare intervals, alone reminding one of human life. A happy day we spent roaming about in Nature's solitude, far from the busy hum of men.

There was one little bit of excitement this day among the hills. It was a funeral. There are not often funerals up here—they can't get people to die : but when there happens to be one, the day is observed as a general holiday.

A long serpentine form was seen wending its way along the hill side. I suggested some antediluvian monster or something in the sea-serpent line. The faces of the females began to pale. They huddled together for protection, and looked round to find some means of escape. There was none, save an almost inaccessible cliff and the river, so they elected very wisely to stay where they were. A superstitious shudder ran through them when a coffin hove in sight, carried by six men, followed by an array of horsemen, ramshackle gigs, and a crowd of men and boys two and two. They were carrying the corpse all the way to Rhayader. The road is so rough that they consider this better than trusting it to a conveyance. Once there was a catastrophe, and the corpse was deposited in the road. The pigs in the vicinity were all visited with swine fever, so now the coffin is carried these six miles by relays of men. As we drove back through Rhayader, the funeral party were refreshing themselves at the pubs, or, as F. R. B. suggested, holding an Irish wake on Welsh lines.

Some rain fell in the night, so early next day we sought

out Evans Evans, inveigled him into our trap, and set off to fish the water we had explored the day previously.

We alighted just above Nantgwilt, and sent Evans Evans on with the trap to Dol Mynach, with instructions to fish up above Dol Mynach, and leave the lower water to us.

We caught a few nice trout, but the river is by no means easy to fish just here. One moment you are in water just over your ankles, and the next step lands you over your waders; and the innumerable slippery rocks and stones are conducive to your showing your heels and sprawling at full length in the stream. This sort of thing is not calculated to improve one's temper, but F. R. B. came to the rescue with an amusing conversation with a native. A local fisherman met us, and F. R. B. never allows anyone to pass without engaging him in ten minutes' confab.

This was possibly the only chance he would have all day, and the most must be made of it. So he stood in mid-stream, and yelled to the man on the bank: "Had good sp-o-o-o-o-rt?"

Yokel: "Eh-h-h-h?"

F. R. B.: "Caught any fis-s-s-s-sh?"

Yokel: "What do yer sa-a-a-a-ay?"

F. R. B.: "Have—you—caught—any—fis-s-s-s-sh?"

Yokel: "Wha-a-a-a-at?"

F. R. B. (to himself): "Hang the fool!" (To yokel): "Have—you—caught—any—trou-ou-ou-out?"

Yokel: "Wha-a-a-a-at sa-a-a-a-ay?"

F. R. B. (to himself): "Confounded lunny!"

But my friend did not mean to be done out of his confab in this way. So he got out of the water, and cross-questioned the man quietly on the bank as to what he had caught, what fly he was using, where the best fish lay, how it was the fish were not rising, if it rained in the night would the fish go better on the morrow, and if there should be sufficient rain

to colour the water would an artificial minnow be more killing than a running worm, or would a live minnow be better than either, or would he recommend the fly as superior to both—if not, what kind of artificial minnow would he recommend, and what sort of live minnow were the fish partial to, where could he (F. R. B.) obtain a supply, would he (the yokel) supply a few if they were required, and, if so, at what charge; if not, would he (the yokel) stand on his head in mid-stream, and whistle “God Save the Queen” to the tune the old cow died of, at so much an hour, and be photographed, and then—but the yokel had passed on out of hearing before the last request was made, utterly flabbergasted at the amount of questions requiring an answer.

At luncheon time Evans Evans joined us at Dol Mynach. He had, as usual, improved the shining hour by catching a nice lot of trout, one being a good fish, over 1½lb. The native had again beaten the gentiles, and as we had the best water we looked and felt small. In common with the rest of my compatriots, I hate being beaten. The thought rankled in my bosom, it robbed the luncheon hour of all pleasure and the midday pipe of its soothing sweetness. We owned, with as good grace as possible, that with the fly Evans Evans was *facile princeps*. With a minnow or running worm we felt assured he would have taken a back seat, the more so as he refused to try conclusions with either, declining to come out when these were the order of the day.

Farewell, Clearwen, thou sweet mountain torrent!

“No more by thee my steps shall be

For ever and for ever.”

Yet I look forward, at some future date, to float on the bosom of thy gathered waters, with the permission of the Birmingham Corporation. How awfully prosaic these last

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words sound ! But the world becomes more and more so every day we live, and romance is like unto some wounded knight that lies a-dying.

III.

Another great feature of Rhayader is its dogs. I have never come across any village before, or since, that could boast of so many curs of high and low degree. They romped about in packs, or lay in the middle of the roads dozing in the sun, utterly oblivious of vehicular traffic. They never thought of moving on the approach of a trap—no such idea ever occurred to them. You might run over them if you wished, but they seemed to have an instinctive knowledge that you would do nothing of the sort, rendered doubly strong from the immunity they had hitherto enjoyed. There was a dare-devil look in their eyes, which seemed to express their feelings : “ Drive over us by all means, if you wish, but it will be your look-out, not ours,” and no one ever did drive over them. The inhabitants treated them very much as the old Egyptians did the crocodile, or the Hindoos their cows, as objects of veneration. They made long circuits round them, and would drive along the footpath and run over their fellow-creatures without turning a hair, rather than disturb the sleeping dogs. If they came to some narrow defile, thickly strewn with these animals, where it was impossible to pass without running over them, they would alight from their traps, and plump down on their knees, and stroke and coax them, and implore them with all sorts of endearing words and actions to remove their lazy carcasses just for one moment. Sometimes the dogs were in an accommodating mood, and after many stretchings and yawnings would slowly remove themselves with a self-satisfied air, as if they were making some unheard of concession at a

great cost and sacrifice to themselves. At other times they would absolutely refuse to budge an inch, and then I have seen those Rhayader folk very sorrowfully climb up into their trap again, turn the horse round, drive down some lane and make a circuit of a mile or so round to reach a point just below these brutes. And what surprised me more than anything was that these people were not angry, and did not give way to bad language as ordinary mortals would have done. Oh, no! they took it all as a matter of course, though scarcely concealing their sorrow that their prayers and entreaties had been unavailing.

F. R. B., who had been trained up in a different school, said he knew there would be murder before he left Rhayader. I tried daily to stem the tide of his blood-thirsty intentions, and repeated the old adage, "When at Rome do as the Romans do."

"All very fine," he replied, "but I am a free-born Englishman, and I am not going to dodge about all over the country to avoid running over a dog. Did you ever see a London cabby stick at such a trifle? No—he goes straight a-head, bumpy, bumpy, bumpy, right over them, and imagines they are stones, and abuses the London County Council for not attending properly to the streets."

However, I think he did see the force of my remarks about the Romans, for nothing very terrible happened. One day, when he was especially reckless, he drove the wheel of the trap over the toe of an unusually low looking-mongrel. A mere trifle, you would think, but it was quite sufficient to set the village by the ears. I have a vivid recollection of the fearful screams that dog uttered, and how all the others rushed to see what was the matter, and joined in with the most piteous howls, and then showed their teeth and grinned horribly at F. R. B. and myself. I feel certain that if we had not have been at a safe distance nothing would have

remained of us save our boots. Crowds of people swarmed round us with muttered threats, and the owners of the injured dog took him up in their arms and ran off to the dispensary as if the creature had been a baby. F. R. B. lost caste after this—he was looked upon with suspicion, and people avoided him if they saw him coming their way.



ROCKS AT PONT-HYLL-FAEN.—SOURCE OF THE ELAN.

Running over a dog in Rhayader brings about the same result as when a Hindoo inadvertantly eats a bit of potted cow.

What was considered by the country folk in the light of a judgment fell on F. R. B. It happened in this way.

F. R. B. was the proud possessor of a well-bred fox-terrier, named Tip, before mentioned. Tip always followed her master about in the same way as the historical lamb followed Mary. A curious dog was Tip, and unlike other fox-terriers. She adored her master and mistress and cordially hated every other specimen of humanity. If you patted her, she growled; if you called her, she looked at



RHAYADER.—ROAD, RAIL, AND RIVER ON THE WAY TO BUILTH.

you out of the corner of her eyes, and made off in an opposite direction. Her favourite pastime, when a visitor arrived, was to sneak up behind and nip his or her leg, not viciously, but more as a reminder that she objected to their presence. Latterly she had imbibed a wholesome dread of me, for I would kick out behind just as she was preparing to grab my leg, and it dawned upon her by degrees that

that game, so far as I was concerned, was played out. I tried in various ways to overcome her objections to me. I have sat for hours whining like a dog, thinking that that might please her—then I tried me-owing, and assumed the character of a cat. By the look she gave out of the corner of her eyes—a look of supreme scorn and contempt—I judged she thought I was making a fool of myself to no purpose, so I gave it up.

Well, F. R. B., his wife and daughter, accompanied by Tip, went for a walk along the river bank, and came to a farm, where sheep-shearing was in progress. Naturally of an inquisitive and curious turn of mind, F. R. B. asked permission of the farmer to view the proceedings. Leave was cordially granted, but as there was the usual swarm of sheep-dogs about the yard, F. R. B. hesitated to take Tip until he was assured that they (the sheep-dogs) would take no notice of her. No sooner, however, had they got inside the gate than a sort of half-bred bull-terrier sprang out of an outbuilding, pounced upon poor Tip's back, rolled her over and over and pinned her to the ground. Mrs. B. placed her hands over her eyes and screamed. Most ladies adopt this method when a startling and unlooked-for crisis arrives.

I recall vividly what befell my grandmother and aunt when they went to pay a visit at a neighbouring country house. My aunt was accompanied by a deerhound which she led upon a chain. As they were going up the drive a fox-terrier accosted them, and at once commenced to make rings round my aunt and the deerhound, barking and snapping viciously at the deerhound's legs and tail. The deerhound yelled ferociously, and tried to go for that terrier, but the chain restrained him. In his struggles he coiled the chain round and round my aunt until she seemed like a bundle of faggots. The noise brought out the lady of the

house, who advanced against her terrier with a dog whip and chevied him round and round my aunt and the deerhound, lashing out in good style. But most of the blows fell upon my unfortunate aunt's legs, and she afterwards confessed that she never received such a trouncing in her life before. At this moment the chain which secured the deerhound broke, and the impetus at once sent my aunt on her back with her legs in the air, and released her dog. Then those two animals set to work and fought like demons over my aunt's prostrate form, the lady of the house still continuing her flogging operations, the lash more often coiling round my poor prostrate aunt than round the bodies of the combatants.

My grandmother, who was of a highly nervous disposition, wrung her hands in speechless agony, and finally plumped herself down on the doorstep, moaning and groaning in a helpless manner, at intervals calling out "George" at the top of her voice, like the firing off of minute guns. No one responded to her call, but no doubt the invoking of a masculine name was consoling in the highest degree.

When the fray was over they all retired into the drawing-room; but conversation was quite out of the question, since they were all panting for breath and speechless, so tea was drunk in silence, and then my grandmother and aunt, with pale, wan faces, crept homeward in the evening twilight.

F. R. B. went for that dog with his stick. He whacked him on every part of the body until he (F. R. B.) was blood-red in the face, with the only result that the dog held on so much the tighter. Then he adjured the farmer in stentorian tones to "call off that brute."

"Call your'n," was the response.

Then F. R. B. set to work and belaboured that dog again with frenzied zeal.

"Whose dog are you a-hittin'?" yelled the farmer wrath-

fully—"hit your own," as F. R. B., with one well-directed blow, knocked the beast head over heels.

Tip, thus released, took the opportunity of pinning her shameless aggressor by the throat, and made him holloa pins and needles. However, poor old Tip had received her *coup de grâce*. A week afterwards she succumbed to blood poisoning in spite of every attention. Many a tear bedewed the sod beneath a laurel bush where Tip was laid to rest, and folk still say in Rhayader that this fatality was a judgment on F. R. B. for running over the lurcher dog.

The rain had come at last, and the streams were coming down very stained, so we decided to try a running worm in the upper part of the Elan above Caban. Just before the junction of the Elan and the Clearwen, you turn off the Nantgwilt road up a rough track which leads to Cwm Elan House, and no further. The roads in this district have a happy knack of suddenly coming to a full stop. In this case we had no alternative but to go boldly up to the house and ask leave to put our pony up. A more charming or romantic spot it is difficult to conceive than that occupied by Cwm Elan House. It is situated on the wooded slope of a natural amphitheatre. I hardly know how to describe it. Take a large basin, fix a toy house on a gentle declivity just above the bottom of the basin, imagine trees in the background, a trout stream wending its way through the foreground, and a ridge of rocks exactly like the side of the basin over against, and you have a bird's-eye view of the situation of Cwm Elan House.

No wonder, indeed, the engineers fixed on this spot as a site of one of the lakes. And a glorious lake it will be! It is a spot where poets might compose some masterpiece, and where the least gifted would find inspiration.

Having put up Gipsy in some very tumble-down stables, we adjourned to the river, which was pouring down in a

regular flood, and made wading out of the question, except in the shallows, but the fish went eagerly at the worm.

I got into conversation with an old rustic whose face resembled a shrivelled-up apple. There were deep furrows in it, well filled with loam, where a respectable crop of potatoes might have been grown without any difficulty. Both men and women in Wales, but especially the latter, are remarkable after a certain age for their shrivelled-up appearance. Girls lose their good looks after twenty years of age, and are quite weird at thirty. This old chap seemed to be an authority on fishing—possibly he was a decayed Rebeccaite. In his youth he said there were some fine trouts in the stream, and pounders were common. He was essentially a *laudator temporis acti*—all old people are. Possibly the savages who once roamed on the banks of this stream obtained more food from its waters than the civilised angler of to-day, but it is doubtful whether the fish were larger. It is the food which makes the size, and I see no reason why the food supply should have been greater in those halcyon days long past.

This rustic was the only philosopher I ever alighted on amongst the Welsh peasantry. He told me he had proved over and over again, on evidence sufficient to hang me or any other man, that fish could not feel pain. In proof of this he told me a remarkable tale.

He was once fishing for pike, he said, and had caught a very small one, not worth keeping. So he cut off part of its tail to use as a bait, and returned it to the water. In less than two minutes he had caught the same fish again with its own tail. In getting the hooks free he accidentally removed an eye before returning the fish to the water as before. He then used the eye as a bait with the tail, which was intact. He again caught the same fish with its own tail and eye. In freeing the fish again, he

accidentally—of course, quite accidentally—removed the remaining eye. His bait this time thus consisted of two eyes and the tail, and again he caught the identical fish. He killed the fish after this and had it stuffed, and “it hangs in my hoose,” he added, “with its tail and two eyes in its mouth.”

I thanked him heartily for this interesting anecdote, and was about to inquire if he had any more of a like nature stored away in the recesses of his brain, when a muffled shriek came down on the flood from the place where F. R. B. was last seen wading. Instantly we turned and gazed up stream. There was not a vestige of anything pertaining to a human being to be seen. F. R. B. had completely disappeared.

“Alack ! your friend’s drowned,” exclaimed the old man philosophically.

“Nonsense.”

“Aye, sure ; he’s either at the bottom of the river, or else he’s been whisked away to heaven.”

“He might have left the fish behind,” I replied, starting off.

A man once disappeared who had committed some fraud. His Gladstone bag was found on the banks of the Thames, but his body was not recovered. Some people contended that he had not committed suicide, while others as stoutly maintained that he had. Their arguments all turned on an umbrella. The man had never been seen out of doors, even on a summer’s day, without an umbrella. Some folks argued that if he had committed suicide his gamp would have been found beside his Gladstone bag, as he would have found no use for it in the other world. They said that the Gladstone bag was a blind, and that he and his umbrella had betaken themselves to Spain.

The other party argued that since he and his gamp were

inseparable, it was only in the natural order of things that they should die together, and that whenever his body was recovered, he would be found tightly grasping his beloved gamp. A very pretty theory this ! but I am inclined to take the former view. I think that the disappearance of the umbrella tended to show that the old gentleman had not committed suicide, but had crossed the seas for some harbour of refuge.



THE WYE BELOW RHAYADER.

F. R. B. had not terminated his existence after all. He emerged dripping and spluttering from the rushing current. It appeared he had been working the worm down stream in a very rapid bit of water, when a dislodged hurdle was swept with terrific force against him and caught him under the knees, laying him on his back in the twinkling of an

eye. Somehow he had become entangled in that hurdle, and it was only with great difficulty he could get free.

It scared him a bit, he said, and visions of sharks, crocodiles, &c., floated through his brain.

The next day we returned to this part of the Elan and tried a Devon minnow. It was broiling hot, but in spite of this we took a nice lot of fish during the morning. There are some pretty falls just before you get to Cwm Elan House, and here I caught one or two good fish and turned over another that could not have been far off a couple of pounds. About three miles up the water, at Pont-Hyll-Faen, the stream has channelled its way in a marvellous manner through the hard rock, the result being a series of falls and silent pools which are well worth seeing.

Sport or no sport there is a strange fascination about these mountain streamlets that wander among the silent hills. At every turn a fresh piece of enchanting scenery meets the eye (like an everchanging kaleidoscope), which makes one think that a life-time spent here in some rustic cottage among books, fishing-rods, guns, and pipes, would not be amiss.

Below Rhayader there is good stretch of trout water in the Wye, extending from the bridge to the junction of the Wye and Elan. We tried it several times, and caught one or two fish about $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and heard that fish up to 4 lbs. were taken here. Below the junction the Wye is a salmon river *par excellence*. The road and rail to Builth run along its bank, and if you want a charming drive you can't do better than take this route.

The bridge at the end of the village is another feature of the place. The Wye here is strewn with rocks, and reminds one of the Shannon. All the year round the bridge is the trysting-place of the unemployed, the maimed and infirm. Day after day they hang over the parapets and geze at the

flowing waters. We were for long curious to know what the attraction could be, so the next time we crossed we did as the Romans. There was nothing to be seen, save a couple of small trout disporting themselves in the pool below. Yet something rooted us to the spot—we found we could not tear ourselves away. We watched the evolutions of those trout with absorbing interest, and we understood at last the fascination of the unemployed.



RHAYADER.—JUNCTION OF THE WYE AND THE ELAN.

After spending most of the morning there, we consulted our watches and found that it was luncheon time. "We shall be late for lunch," we both exclaimed, but we hung over the bridge and made no attempt to move.

For another half-hour we calculated the chances of life or death to certain flies as they sailed down towards the trout. F. R. B. got so excited that he wanted to bet on the

subject, and attracted general attention by shouting out, "Now, two to one on that fly escaping."

The unemployed crowded round, but no one responded. There was a slight ripple on the water, and the fly had disappeared from human ken.

F. R. B. looked foolish, and someone in the motley assemblage called out, "You'll not make your fortune like that, gaffer." Yes, the man actually called him "gaffer," and, although wild horses would not have torn F. R. B. away from the bridge, that word "gaffer," coupled with a ravenous appetite, sent him home. He said "gaffer" was disrespectful.

When the salmon are coming up I should think the excitement must be intense, and the bridge impassable for vehicles. We could have spent our days there quite comfortably at that season. Possibly we should have strolled back for dinner in the evening, but even this is doubtful.

As we passed over it with our luggage piled up high on a conveyance from the inn, F. R. B. wanted to get out and have a last look, but we held him down and got him safely over into the station, and then bribed the station-master to lock him up in the waiting room until the arrival of the train.

If we have not been transported to some distant star in another ten years' time, we mean to return here and sail on the placid bosom of the lakes, and write a few more notes on "Rhayader revisited."

My friend Ginger; or, a Novice's Exploits.

AT school he had acquired the name of "Ginger," in some measure owing to the colour of his hair. It was not a classical name by any means, but it was expressive and affectionate. I was always chums with Ginger. He had inherited great sporting proclivities and these drew me to him and made us akin. As a boy he stalked the stubbles with a worn-out single-barrelled muzzle loader in search of larks or a stray rabbit, and followed the hounds occasionally on the family carriage horse, an awkward stilty steed, whose duties otherwise consisted in conveying Ginger's mother and sisters to make afternoon calls and to the social gatherings of the neighbourhood, a monotonous existence relieved now and then by being required to cart a ton or two of coals from the neighbouring town.

The honour of initiating Ginger into the art of fly-fishing belonged to me, at least I superintended his education. In making a commencement, Ginger insisted on adopting what I call a theoretical method. He selected a long stretch of green sward free from trees, fastened a piece of white paper on the ground, placed himself at a distance of twenty yards from this spot and set to work with the avowed object of displacing that piece of paper by the help of a swishy rod rigged up with a very light line on which dangled "a red spinner." I cannot say that I smiled on this pet idea of

his, but since he was bent on acting upon it I offered no opposition—nay, forwarded the undertaking. It speaks well for Ginger's patience and perseverance when I add that six hours a day at least were spent on this self-inflicted task. Day after day wearied and disgusted he turned away, despairing of ever been able to direct that fitful fly to the appointed spot. That red spinner seemed possessed to the full with the spirit of perverseness, for it clung with tenacious grasp to his hat, his coat, and trousers. Its demonstration of affection towards Ginger were quite painful to witness, its whole soul seemed to revolt at the idea of coming in contact with that piece of paper. Even Ginger was touched, and handled the poor thing tenderly as he loosened its convulsive grasp, the tear on his cheek seemed to imply that he felt he was playing the part of an unfeeling brute.

At length, one day, as the shadows were beginning to lengthen, and all nature was wrapped in restfulness and quiet, an Indian war-whoop rang out through the solemn stillness. I rushed wildly out, expecting to find Ginger lifeless or in a fit produced from over-exertion. My hurried calculations, however, were entirely upset, for I found Ginger with life still in his body, but trembling with excitement, his eyes goggling from his head, he was gazing intently on the ground, gibbering incoherently. I saw at a glance what had happened. His mission was at last accomplished, for there lay that piece of paper, and horrified fly in close embrace. I say "horrified," for I have never seen such a pitiable look of anguish on any red spinner's visage before or since. I was glad for Ginger's sake, and congratulated him; but I felt sorry for the fly.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten event, for in Ginger's eyes it raised him a step higher in the scale of rational beings; henceforward his operations would be transferred

from the green sward to the limpid stream, his prey no longer a lifeless corpse but the unknown inhabitants of the watery deep. Dreams of future exploits came not singly but in battalions. Might he not some day eclipse the fame of Izaak Walton? Might he not uplift some monster from the vasty deep unknown to the angling fraternity, and earn for himself undying fame?

Through the village of Copwick there flows a sluggish stream into which some enterprising person had introduced, some years back, a few trout. These had multiplied at a great rate, and had thrived and fattened upon the mud and weeds which marked its course. The banks were lined with pollards, bushes, and reeds, so that it was a matter of some difficulty, even to the most expert angler, to get a straight line out, and tempt the fat and wily fish to rise. Nevertheless, this was to be the scene of Ginger's first public appearance with the rod.

It is hardly necessary to relate that success did not at first attend his venture. He himself told me in pathetic terms of days spent in fruitless labour of making the close acquaintance of every tree and bush in the vicinity of the water. These trees all bore marks and hieroglyphics, records of occasions he had swarmed among their branches in search of his truant flies. It was a romantic life, spent, as it was, between earth and heaven. Ginger soon became as active as a monkey. Rotten old pollards, which would have taken any ordinary individual a considerable time to ascend were overcome with astonishing ease. To make a slight deviation from the ordinary routine, for even swarming trees becomes monotonous, he would wind his cast of flies round his body with such marvellous dexterity and rapidity that, as he well said, the thing was done before he could say "Jack Robinson." The flies would stick in his clothes at the rear exactly in a spot where he could not get at them, with the

consequence that he had to divest himself of his outer clothing before they could be removed.

Once when he was in the act of thus freeing himself, covered with nothing more than a shirt, he descried ladies in the offing. He hurriedly clothed himself without having had time to remove the flies, and awaited their advent. They turned out to be friends of Ginger's who had come down expressly to see him fish.

"Now, we want to see how you throw the flies," said the elder of the girls. Ginger devoutly wished that he could give them an exposition of the gentle art, but unfortunately at that moment he was firmly secured, bound round and round with yards of cast.

"Do catch us a little trout," exclaimed the girls, clasping their hands and casting a beseeching look at poor Ginger.

"I fear I can't—h'm—just now," replied poor Ginger, in mental anguish, not knowing what to say.

"Oh! you are unkind; we've come down on purpose—do! do!" said the girls, with their sweetest smiles.

"I—I—will another day—the sun is so hot—it has rather overpowered me," almost sobbed Ginger.

"Poor fellow," exclaimed the girls in chorus, "we are so sorry—can we do anything for you? Shall we run and fetch a glass of water?"

"No—oh! no, thank you," replied the wretched Ginger, "I shall be all right directly."

Now these girls had brought with them their maltese dog, and the bullocks in the field had silently collected together and approached to get a near view of the aforesaid dog, with the object of hustling it off their territory. The dog fled to its mistress's petticoats for protection, thereby causing her to turn round and learn the cause of her pet's alarm.

"Oh, look, look at those horrid cows—they are trampling

on your rod. Quick ! Emily, pick it up," she shrieked. And Emily, thus adjured, snatched it up, terror stricken, and ran for her life, and in doing so nearly removed poor Ginger with it. So violent was her action that the flies penetrated poor Ginger's flesh. He sprang to his feet with a terrific yell ; Emily dropped the rod, and both the girls fairly took to their heels and fled, imagining that the cows were after them. Quick as lightning Ginger broke the cast clear of the line, and thus ended a very unpleasant quarter of an hour—but the girls administered a severe rebuke to Ginger for frightening them so terribly with that fearful yell—little did they guess the cause of Ginger's anguish.

At other times, with the simplest turn of his wrist, he would weave flies and cast into such an inextricable tangle that there was nothing to be done but to cut off "the whole bag of tricks" (as he very appropriately named the tangle), and request his sisters to unravel the jumble at their leisure.

These slight hindrances to the congenial pastime never disturbed the equilibrium of Ginger's mind, but rather afforded food for the deepest reflection.

Incredible though it may seem, these angling eccentricities on Ginger's part affected the village in a most remarkable manner. There had lately been established at Copwick a telegraph office, a want which had long been felt by its aristocratic inhabitants.

The telegraph wires ran along the banks of the stream for some distance, and then crossed at right angles. These wires were a source of very great annoyance to our youthful fisherman, who never by any chance came into their vicinity without entangling his flies thereon ; and, although his climbing abilities after such a long course of practice were of the highest order, yet he never dared swarm the telegraph posts. An innate fear of the electric fluid effectually

prevented this. In process of time these wires literally swarmed with casts and flies. To the outward eye it appeared as if myriads of insects hovered round them. To add to the strange portent, a few unsuspecting swallows had mistaken the artificial for the natural, and on the wing had seized their prey and being unable to extricate themselves had eventually died of exhaustion and starvation. Thus the swaying and putrefying corpses of birds made up a weird and mysterious scene.

That these piscatorial mementoes of Ginger's misfortunes and the suspended animal matter produced some sensible effect on the electric current, I am decidedly inclined to believe from the events which followed.

The messages conveyed by these wires became totally unintelligible to the receivers. It was rumoured that the officials at the village post-office were incompetent, and that to render the messages at all readable they doctored them with words and readings of their own. In the old days, before telegraph operators became as expert in the business as nowadays, many ludicrous blunders were perpetrated.

In "Temple's Anecdotes" an American manager of a telegraph company gives an instance of recent occurrence upon the line between Boston and New York. A gentleman sent a despatch requesting parties at New York to forward sample forks by express. When the message was delivered it read thus—"Forward sample for K. S." This was excusable, from the necessary ambiguity of sending one line at a time. At Copwick the matter was different. The messages were distinctly doctored. It created quite a flutter among the parsons and retired warriors of the district. It was a matter of common talk at every social reunion : it formed a new and pleasing topic of conversation in a district where local gossip had talked itself threadbare.

The matter at last reached a climax by the receipt of a telegram which placed a whole household in deep distress. It was a message from a late guest, a young man of hitherto unblemished character to the beautiful daughter of the house. It ran thus—"Dear Pet must come at once if as you say. Keep warm indoors coming to propose if possible."

Naturally such a telegram created a painful impression in the family circle, and made the young lady an object of suspicion in spite of protests. On the morrow, when this unpleasant episode was being discussed, the dastardly sender of the telegram was announced, and as had been pre-arranged he was ushered into the study, where the outraged parent sought an interview. The result was eminently satisfactory, in fact his explanation put the matter in an entirely different light. It appeared that Mrs. ——— had written a short note, telling him that his fox-terrier, which had been entrusted to her care for a few weeks, was ailing, and that the gardener believed the dog had got "the yellows." In reply he had at once telegraphed "Fear vet. must come at once if as you say. Keep warm. Propose coming to-morrow if possible."

It was consequently apparent to every one that the message had either been transmitted incorrectly, owing to the incompetency or carelessness of some official, or from some defect in the working of the wires, had become unintelligible to the official at Copwick, who had doctored it with readings of his own, and then addressed it to the pretty daughter of the house, supposing it would be more intelligible to her than her mother.

The authorities at headquarters were promptly made acquainted with this and several other cases, and the whole matter was thoroughly sifted. Nothing ever transpired as to the actual cause of these aberrations of telegraphy, but I

have reason to suppose that Ginger's fishing mementoes played no unimportant part, for passing along the river bank shortly afterwards, I found they had been ruthlessly swept away, and now live only in after dinner talk across the walnuts and the wine.





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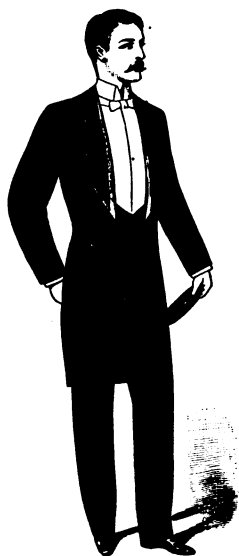


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